

TRENDS IN NOLLYWOOD

A Study of Selected Genres



Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma

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Dedication

To

The memories of

My late father:

Chief Martins Akpoatimibranimighan Eyegulegu Ayakoroma
who believed that I will be a star in the family

My late brother:

Norman Ayakoroma (Dr. No)
who sacrificed by waiting for me to go to the university
before marrying

and

All those:

who are not alive to see
the great moment!

I love you all!

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Emmanuel Emasealu, Dr. Innocent Ohiri, Dr. (Mrs.) Julie Umukoro, Dr. John Yeseibo, Dr. Faith Ugo-Aminikpo, Dr. Friday Nwafor, Dr. Sam Dede, Dr. Chika Onu, Messrs Columbus Irisoanga, Michael Ogbolosingha, Harold Fyneface, Patrick Agha, and others, I want to say thank you all for the support.

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I want to also put on record that veterans of the Ijaw nation in the profession, like Mr. Comish Ekiye, Mr. Melville Obriango, Chief Uriel Paul-Worika, and Chief Simon Ambakederemo, have inspired me. I have always told anyone that cared to listen that, but for what I used to see of Comish and Melville in *The Village Headmaster* in the mid-1970s, perhaps, I may have read Law or Business Administration, as my folks had wanted. Actually, the major preference was Law, so that I could probably take care of the several family land cases. I must say that today, I have no

regrets. All thanks to my *Big Uncles* – Comish, Teacher Oghene, Uncle P, and Beks Royal.

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I have not forgotten my immediate family. I have deliberately left the best for the last. I give a standing ovation to my darling wife, Letty, who has always been there for me. She is really a woman of inestimable value. Honey, this book, *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres*, is the result of the long nights on the laptop; this is for us!

To our children: Douyebralado, Tarila, Peremoboere, Oyintonye, and Tamaranebi, as well as Binaebi Aduze, and Egiobu Rex-Ogbuku, I want to say, to God be the glory!

Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma, PhD

Abuja-FCT, Nigeria

Foreword

It is always a thing of joy when a new book on the Nigerian film industry is published. In this respect, I feel very much honoured to write this **Foreword**. I also feel very happy that this work has been published locally because many Diaspora Nigerian intellectuals have written books on the Nigerian cinema but unfortunately, very few of these publications are available for use in Nigerian universities. Of course, some of the blame can be apportioned to our colleagues in the acquisition sections of university libraries across the country. Whether it is as a result of inferiority complex or colonial mentality, I do not know, but I have noticed that our librarians would rather acquire works published by foreign authors, even when similar ones published by Nigerian Diaspora scholars or locally based scholars are available in the market. We take note of these things when we go around the country on NUC accreditations. Charity begins at home. Our librarians should show some measure of patriotism by acquiring and stocking the works published by Nigerian authors and then balance them with those of foreign authors.

Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma's book, *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres*, is a welcome addition to the growing body of works on the Nigerian cinema. Since the publication of Jonathan Haynes anthology, *Nigerian Video Films*, other works such as Mathias Krings and Onookome Okome's anthology, *Global Nollywood: Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, Foluke Ogunleye's *African Video Film Industry*, Abdalla Uba Adamu's *Passage from India – Transnational Media Flows and African Cinema: The Video Film in Northern Nigeria* and Innocent Ebere Uwah's *The Rhetoric of Culture in Nollywood* have been published. These works are helping to define the emerging trends within the Nigerian film industry whose UNESCO rating as the third largest film culture in the world is now common knowledge.

Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma's book, *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres*, is part film history and part film theory and criticism. The history part of it traces the origin of the Nigerian cinema up to the present era of video productions. The work examines in detail, the contextual issues which have helped to define emergent trends within the industry. The fascinating aspect of the work exploits the theories of film genres as a framework for the analysis of the genres in the Nigerian film industry. Film scholarship, like the older art disciplines like literary studies, mass communication, theatre arts, fine arts, genre studies, and so on, is replete with critical models for textual analysis. They range from genre criticism, to auteurism, to psychoanalytic criticism, to postcolonial discourse and criticism, feminist criticism, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, modernism and post-modernity, and so on. Scholarship within the film industry is wide open. It will take off fully when Departments of Film and TV Studies are established in the country to give disciplinary focus to the film industry.

The film industry, like every other productive sector of the national economy, can only grow to meet our expectations and desires if we provide it disciplinary scholarly focus. If you cannot imagine growth in the financial sector, the oil, gas and petrochemical sector, the pharmaceutical sector, the legal sector, the economic sector, and so on, without the presence of the foundational disciplines to drive them, so also it is with the film industry. It is when we provide it disciplinary foundation through the establishment of Departments of Film & TV Studies that the culture of excellence will begin to emerge in both production and scholarship in the related fields. This book, *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres*, is therefore an important contribution towards the establishment of a culture of film scholarship in Nigeria. Issues related to genre theories and critical practice are examined in details in the work. This should provide scholars and students an additional critical approach to the study of the Nigerian cinema.

The work is divided into five Parts, with **Part One**, entitled "Background of Nollywood – the Contemporary Nigerian Film

Industry”, providing contextual information on the Nigerian cinema; **Part Two** deals with genre theories and it is entitled “Studies in Genres in Nollywood”; **Parts Three, Four and Five** deal with textual analysis of case studies of epic films, gangster/vigilante genre and political films. The textual analysis of the films chosen for case studies is equally given detailed contextual attention prior to the textual analysis.

The book is written in simple and accessible English, which is very good because in works dealing with the subject matter of film theory and criticism, there is always the temptation to descend into conceptual jargons and a dense style which could end up making the work inaccessible to undergraduate students. In this respect, it is a work which scholars, policymakers, students and film enthusiasts would find quite readable and informative. Therefore, I strongly recommend the book, *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres*, to scholars, students, policymakers and practitioners interested in the growth and development of the Nigerian cinema.

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Introduction

The introduction of television in Nigeria, in 1959, offered the citizenry opportunity to share in various televised experiences. The old scenario is still very fresh in the minds of Nigerian television audiences. Television dramas on the network service of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), in the 1980s and 1990s, like Peter Igho's *Cockcrow at Dawn*, Lola Fani-Kayode's *Mirror in the Sun*, Zeb Ejiro's *Ripples*, Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Basi & Company*, Matt Dadzie's *Riddles and Hopes*, John Ndanusa's *Supple Blues*, and Amaka Igwe's *Checkmate*, among others, were staples in the viewing experience of Nigerians. It was such that on the days such programmes were scheduled, viewers hurried home to keep a date with the broadcasts. Such shared dramatic experiences constituted the major topics of discussion in homes and, of course, in offices, schools, markets, or motor parks the next day. This was the era of television soap operas. These were probably the only times that various family members or neighbours sat together, in one accord, to share in given dramatic situations. In the rural communities, people would struggle to peep through windows in the houses of the privileged few, who had television sets, because the whole place would be overflowing with enthusiastic viewers.

This is not the case now because a new artistic medium has gradually assumed an emphatic position in the viewing experience of Nigerians, Africans and Blacks in the Diaspora. The contemporary Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, the popular nomenclature by which the contemporary Nigerian film industry has come to be known, has become a phenomenon,

projecting Nigerian culture, and indeed, the African continent, to the outside world. In other words, what the Western world sees on screen as reflections of the cultural heritage of Nigeria are no more warped impressions hurriedly presented by foreigners, but what is projected by Nigerians. The concern now is whether the key players in the industry were actually telling such stories through the film medium to project the image of the country positively, or otherwise.

Kenneth Nnebue, an electronic equipment dealer, has the credit for recording a breakthrough in 1992, with the production of the first commercial video film, *Living in Bondage 1* (Vic Mordi, 1992). Though the film was in Igbo language, it opened the floodgates for producers to experiment in a new filmic medium – the video film. It was believed that the experimentation would be a flash in the pan; but it was not to be, as the industry has grown beyond the wildest imagination of media watchers. For instance, buoyed by the unimaginable success, Nnebue did not waste time in coming out with a sequel, *Living in Bondage 2* (Christian Onu, 1995). This unarguably brought Nollywood into existence, despite the extreme position by critics like Ola Balogun (Ejike, 2005), who maintain that there is nothing like Nollywood.

This breakthrough of the video format took place at a time the cinema industry had collapsed. The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by the Gen. Ibrahim Babangida regime, which affected the country's economy in several ways, namely, the devaluation of the naira which affected the economics of celluloid production, poor distribution and exhibition channels for film productions, the rise of urban crime after the Nigerian civil war, the dilapidation of cinema theatres, and the rise and development of television drama as a source of family entertainment, were some of the major factors that gave rise to the contemporary Nigeria film industry. It is also argued that the rise of the film industry in Nigeria was influenced by the advent of television soap operas, which are the precursors of the film medium. In other words, the exploits of independent television producers were instrumental to the birth of professional and commercial film productions in Nigeria.

As a brainchild of “business circumstances,” the contemporary Nigerian film industry, at inception, seemed to have been, more or less, an all-comers’ affair. There were no set standards to check those venturing into the industry. The phenomenon has not changed markedly in spite of attempts by stakeholders to sanitise the industry. To crown it all, government has been playing the spectator, merely observing the development in the industry, thus losing billions of naira. For example, while star artists were collecting close to two million naira (N2m) as artiste fees per role in film productions as at 2004, such incomes were (and still are) not taxed, which is not the case in developed film industries. Furthermore, the involvement of businessmen in the production of films in the video format is the in-thing in Nigeria, irrespective of the area of specialisation of prospective producers/directors. The common denominator is the availability of the financial resources to venture into the business. It was not surprising then that foreign video film sellers, electronic equipment merchants, spare parts dealers, cement and even other building materials sellers cashed in on the window of opportunities offered by the emergent Nigerian film industry. They veered into the lucrative business to the extent that the idea of cinema or the celluloid appears to be immaterial in the country.

However, the emergent Nigerian film industry has given rise to a new class of business executives – the marketers or the executive producers (the EPs). They are supposed to be the middlemen, who operate between the producers and the distributors or video marts; but they have since transformed and are actually in the business of financing and distributing the films. Some of them have even turned producers and directors, probably in the bid to cut costs and to protect their investments. Worth noting also is the fact that these marketers decide who plays given roles in their productions, giving credence to the popular dictum that, “he who pays the piper dictates the tune.” Any attempt by a new entrant into the industry to defy the all-powerful marketers means such a film ends up in the cooler; or at best, it is pirated thus putting such a producer out of business. It has also given rise to a situation

where there are talks of “selling faces” appearing in a film before it is seen as a prospective marketable production. These selling faces are actually the stars that the industry has created, over the years, and they enjoy the attendant glamour, as it obtains in Hollywood, the American film industry.

Nollywood, as at 2002, was adjudged the third largest in the world, after Hollywood (United States) and Bollywood (India) (Onishi, 2002, p. 1; Adesanya, 2006, p. 30; “Nollywood is number 3,” p. 1). The implication of a third place rating was that Nollywood had grown bigger than what obtained in Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, Japan, China, Australia, and South Africa, just to mention few advanced and developed countries. In the words of Tecu Benson, a director in Nollywood, “we are colonising Africa again through our movies” (Adetula, 2004, p. 2). The thinking then is that if there is adequate government or institutional support, the industry will grow in leaps and bounds in no distant time to overtake Bollywood. In fact, as at 2004, it was speculated that the industry had generated well over three hundred billion naira (₦300b) into the Nigerian economy; and it was also said have created well over 300,000 jobs for young men and women (“Nollywood,” p. 1; Aderinokun, 2004; Aihe, 2005, p. 30; Drakard, 2006; “Just do it,” p. 1). These were in the areas of transport and catering services, hospitality, location arrangements, costumes and make-up, technical assistants, production assistants, extras or *waka pass*, in addition to the major professional areas of script writers, actors, directors, producers, cameramen, special effects generators, film editors, advert visualisers, poster designers, printers, and sales personnel, among others.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the video film medium has metamorphosed into a very powerful instrument for home entertainment in the African continent, so much so that the collapse of the cinema industry has almost become a non-issue. This is in the sense that the contemporary film industry has become a strong phenomenon, filling the vacuum created by the collapse of cinema practice in the Nigerian economy. There is now the realisation that the industry could indeed be exploited, becoming a high revenue earner and reducing the

country's overdependence on oil and gas.

Thus, *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres* examines the trends in Nollywood, the contemporary Nigerian film industry, with a critical focus on the development and application of genres, specifically, in the first 15 years of the industry. The fact remains that artistically, the script is the departure point for every theatrical production. In film practice, however, this is decided by certain prevalent conventions, most often by the viewing public and market forces. Consequent upon this premise, the book examines how Nigerian film producers/directors, through their experimentations with various generic conventions, have attempted to satisfy audiences' tastes and make good returns on the financiers' investments. The above is attempted through a critical analysis of selected emergent genres in the industry.

The choice of this topic brought one face to face with a major research problem: the dearth of reference materials on critical studies on trends in the contemporary Nigerian film industry. There are yet to be detailed works on this emergent industry, which promises to be a high revenue earner for the country, so much so that if properly harnessed, it would surpass earnings in the nation's oil and gas sector. Most works that exist (and they are mostly articles), treat just aspects of the industry like selected genres and textual analysis of one or two films, censorship, or at best the aesthetics of particular language or ethnic films – Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa. Thus, it is believed that a comprehensive book of this nature would be contributing invaluable to the body of available source materials on trends in the contemporary Nigerian film industry, with particular reference to the application of genres and generic development.

The word, *genre*, is originally a French word, which means, *kind, sort or type*. From the literary perspective, *genre* has been defined simply as, "any of the traditional development of art forms from a single field of activity into various kinds according to criteria particular to that form" ("Genre," p. 1). Worth emphasising in this definition is the fact that the division is in accordance with *certain criteria that are particular to that form*. Graeme Turner (1988) expatiates when he defines *genre* as:

the way in which groups of narrative conventions (involving plot, character and even locations or set design) become organised into recognisable types of narrative entertainment: Western or musicals for instance (as cited in Yeseibo, 2004, p. 39).

However, the thesis explored in *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres* is that genres are not specific creations of any individual person (or persons) within a given film industry. In other words, genres are not the creation of a scriptwriter, producer, director, scholar or critic, working within the film industry. Rather, genres evolve at a particular point in the history of an emergent film industry, as a result of the viewing interest of the audience and the market forces which drive the industry. Unlike trends in literature that are dependent on particular slants arising from the context within which such works are written, what drives and sustains genres within a film industry is the taste of the audience. A major thesis is how the taste of the Nigerian audience has helped to create and sustain particular kinds of stories within the emergent film industry. The idea is to chart a trend in the application of particular genres and the generic development in the privately driven industry. In the course of doing this, the argument is that the collapse of the cinema industry and the rise of the television soap operas provided the enabling atmosphere for Nollywood to emerge.

The background study encompasses the origin and development of film and television drama in Nigeria. This is to situate our position that the collapse of the cinema industry in Nigeria in the mid-1980s necessitated practitioners finding alternative avenues of experimentation to produce what could stand in the gap as films. This is followed by a study of the generic development of the contemporary Nigerian film industry. The study is approached from the historical perspective to establish, among other things, the application of genres and generic conventions prevalent in the industry. This is by examining select emergent genres in the industry, and how some of the works have attempted to meet the audience's tastes. In doing this, there is a general study of the context of production in the industry, how the industry has created many stars and

provided dependable source of income for many, the rise of film directors which has made the transition back to the celluloid format appear inconsequential; the rise in support or ancillary services in the industry, the problem of censorship, the marketing of films and the scourge of piracy.

The fact is that over the years, the taste of Nigerian viewers has been refined to a large extent. The reasons can be hinged on two factors, which, according to Stanley Kauffman, have formed men's taste in any art:

knowledge of that art and the knowledge of life... but the function of taste seems increasingly to be the selection and appraisal of the works that are most valuable – most necessary – to the individual's existence (cited in Murray, 1973, p.170).

In the exciting film industry, the good critic knows that the viewers have to identify with a production before they can appreciate it fully. Once they are enlightened, their level of awareness acts as an impetus for the producer. The critic will put at the back of his/her mind, the fact that they (the audiences) would not just accept any substandard production that is presented for their viewership. An apt summation of the need for illuminating criticism can be seen from Walt Wiltman's position thus:

Great audiences make great poets (filmmakers) because they provide a need and a receiving ground for good poetry (films), they inspire the poet (filmmaker) to do his best by giving him a reason for being that transcends his physical identity. Advances in film technology and subject matter have occurred and will continue to occur because film artist and film audience have become knowledgeable together (as cited in Agee *et al*, p. 313).

The emergent Nigerian film industry has survived for about a decade and half, in spite of the harsh economic conditions the country has been going through. Irrespective of the fact that the industry has been criticised and denigrated in certain quarters, as not meeting international standards, the industry has developed to a stage where it has received global attention, attracting encouraging research and business interests.

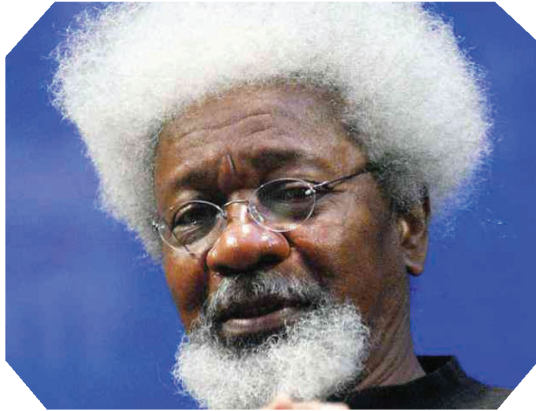
Consequently, there is need to study the circumstances surrounding its survival. It is also salutary to undertake a critical assessment to see how stakeholders could improve standards. Furthermore, the study is significant as it draws certain conclusions that would be of interest to those nurturing the dream of venturing into the celluloid format, supposedly, to make a mark in the global film industry. Above all, the critical reading of selected emergent genres: the epic/historical (*Igodo* and *Egg of Life*), crime/vigilante (the *Issakaba* series), and the political (*The Senator* and *Masterstroke*), reveal that there are prospects in the contemporary Nigerian film industry, which should stimulate further studies. This underscores the fact that this book is a veritable reference material for prospective independent film-TV producers, directors, and screenplay writers, in addition to government functionaries taking policy decisions on the film industry in Nigeria, as well as students of Film-TV Production and Theory and Criticism.

In conclusion, the foundation blocks for *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres* have been laid in this introduction. The aim, the thesis to be explored, the significance of the work and its general background have been highlighted. The details are examined in subsequent parts, which constitute the body of the study.

INTRODUCTION 1



Chief Hubert Ogunde



Nobel Laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka



Ayakoroma with Jonathan Haynes

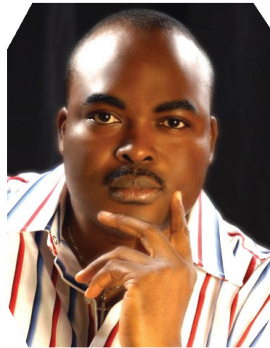
INTRODUCTION 2



Ayakoroma, Adibe & Shaka



Matthias Obahiagbon -
Nollywood Producer



Emeka Ossai -
Nollywood Actor



Ayakoroma, Amayo & Shaka

INTRODUCTION 3



Ayakoroma, Ejike



Ayakoroma, Awurum, Shaka



Ayakoroma, Arinze

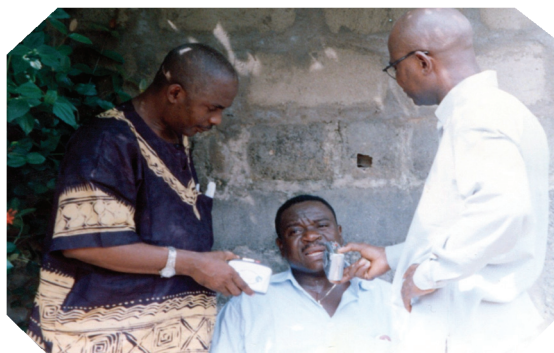
INTRODUCTION 4



Ayakoroma, Bruno, Shaka



Shaka, Edochie, Ayakoroma



Ayakoroma, Okafor (Ibu), Shaka

INTRODUCTION 5



Kenneth Nnebue -
Nollywood Producer



Charles Novia -
Nollywood Director



Zeb, Joke, Olu Jacobs



Chief Chika Okpala -
Zebrudaya of Masquerade



Tarila Thompson -
Nollywood Director

INTRODUCTION 6



Ayakoroma, Edochie



Nollywood Director, Chika Onu
with Ayakoroma



Prof. Emeka Nwabueze -
Nollywood Actor



Ndubuisi Okoh -
Nollywood Director

Part

1



Background of Nollywood – The Contemporary Nigerian Film Industry

1.1 Introduction

In this first part, the rise and fall of the cinema industry and the advent of television drama in Nigeria, especially the soap opera format, which fertilised the ground for professional film practice, are examined. The idea is to highlight the film conventions that have impacted on the contemporary Nigerian film industry. It also examines the nature of film censorship, piracy, and the marketing approach in the industry, to establish the trend the industry has charted since its emergence.

1.2 Film in Nigeria: A Historical Background

In the history of film, Thomas Armat has the credit of perfecting the projector in 1885. Incidentally, Nigerians only came in contact with what had been popularly referred to as, “the magic lantern,” in 1903. This was exactly at the time Edwin S. Porter produced the first feature film, *The Great Train Robbery*. According to Opubor, Nwuneli and Oreh (1979, p. 2), the first film to be exhibited in the country was at the Glover Memorial

Hall, Lagos in August 1903; and the feat was achieved by a European merchant, Stanley Jones. The films shown then included scenes of the coronation of King Edward VII at Westminster Abbey, and a brief glimpse of the Alake of Abeokuta during a visit to England. One could imagine the excitement of the audience at seeing their own brother and kabiyesi appearing in the magic lantern. Apparently, this exercise was part of the colonial ploy to score a political point – a display of the supposed wonders of the Western world.

The above position would be further buttressed from a cursory look at the involvement of the Church and the Colonial Government in the Nigerian cinema industry, as analysed by Adesanya (1997), Ekwuazi (1987), Enahoro (1997), Haynes (1997), Mgbejume (1989), Okome and Haynes (1995), and Shaka (2002; 2003; 2004). Basically, film as a medium of communication was perceived as a veritable instrument for propaganda. The Church, for example, saw civilisation and Christianity as potent weapons to subjugate the African traditional culture and religion. They brought relevant films that would help them achieve their set goals. According to Shaka (2002), the colonial government became involved in the business of film production in 1929 in an attempt to contain an outbreak of a plague within the Lagos Protectorate. He states further:

The initiative to use film as a medium of public enlightenment/ instruction on the vectors of the plague was the brainchild of William Sellers, the Chief Health Officer, Federal Department of Health. Sellers employed film to illustrate to the people of the Lagos Protectorate the ways in which rats carry the disease, and also enlisted their cooperation in eliminating the plague bearing rats (Shaka, 2002, p.12).

Elsewhere, Shaka, in his discourse on modernity and African cinema, captures the involvement of the colonialists in the cinema industry thus:

The cinematic institution started out quite early as a form of entertainment in Africa, promoted by smart businessmen out to make money. Exhibitions were held in city and small town halls and school compounds,

even before movie theatres were built. As the popularity of the medium grew, missionaries out to convert Africans to Christianity used the cinema as an instrument for proselytisation (Shaka, 2004, p.19).

By World War II, the colonial administration saw the essence of propaganda through the film medium. However, this idea was three-pronged:

- (i) the need to convince the colonies that Germany was the common enemy;
- (ii) the need to encourage the colonies to embark on communal developments; and
- (iii) the need to tell the world at large that the colonial administration was doing a fantastic job in the Dark Continent (Ekwuazi, 1987, p. 2).

In his analysis, Shaka (2004) identifies three film practices that obtained during the earliest period of the emergence of the cinematic institution in Nigeria:

- (i) commercial productions which were later to be censored by a Film Censorship Board to avoid embarrassing the colonial administration;
- (ii) missionary-sponsored productions; and
- (iii) government-sponsored productions.

He observes that the last two practices carried certain affinities in the sense that, "they were out to teach Africans modern methods of doing things aimed at promoting colonial government development policies" (Shaka, 2004, p.20). Consequently, films from the Colonial Film Unit (CFU), British Council and the Crown Film Unit were distributed for exhibition to achieve the above objectives.

Though film became a potent medium of mass communications in Nigeria, with the above development, it has been observed that it remained under imperialist control. This explains the view of Ekwuazi that, even where the CFU produced films in Nigeria, they were made for Africans but were, to a very limited extent, made by Africans (Ekwuazi, 1987, p. 7). The consolation was that at independence, the industry in

Nigeria was restructured. Though late Chief Hubert Ogunde, the doyen of professional theatre practice in Nigeria, initiated moves in 1945 toward producing local films, Nigerians only became seriously involved in film production after independence; and this was at a time the feature film format was gaining prominence. In his catalogue of indigenous films, Ekwuazi (1987) lists *Bound for Lagos* (Edric O'Connor, 1962) produced by Federal Films as the first production; and *Mama Learns A Lesson* (1963) produced by Northern Nigeria Film Unit as the first film in any Nigerian local language – Hausa. He avers that the process was taken a step further when,

in April 1975, cinema history was made in Nigeria. The first feature film recorded in a Nigerian language – Ibo – was produced by Afrocult Foundation Limited. The film, *Amadi*, was an instant success with Igbo and non-Igbo audiences alike (Ekwuazi, 1987, p. 15).

Furthermore, Ekwuazi (1987) cites *Ajani Ogun* (Balogun, 1976), also produced by Afrocult, as the first Yoruba feature film. This started a cinematic tradition as film in the local languages, at that time, thrived among the Yoruba. The success is attributable to the fact that professional traditional theatre practice was vibrant in Western Nigeria before the advent of the cinema industry in Nigeria. Since the practitioners had their ready audiences, all they did was to transfer their productions onto the reel. This process was not without problems, as Soyinka (1979) observes:

The main danger from theatre to cineaste is ironically its relatedness ... the two are interrelated and mutually compliment each other so often, both in practice and theory, that new comers to cinema ... tend very often to transpose the form of theatre directly onto film with of course stagy, static films (Soyinka, 1979, p. 98).

This shortcoming was experienced in the cinema years in Nigeria because the earliest films were more or less recordings of adapted stage productions. The implication was that the productions were hardly anything to write home about in terms of artistic, aesthetic and technical presentation. This is in the

sense that film itself is a different medium where foreign materials had unobtrusively set certain standards for the audience and directors. This underpins the position of Ekwuazi that, “the indigenous film is colonised – by the stage on one hand, and on the other, one or more superior film cultures” (Ekwuazi, 1987, p.18). Apparently, the superior film cultures referred to then were Hollywood (USA), Bollywood (India), British, Chinese, French, and German film industries, to mention a few.

At the introduction of cinema in Nigeria, government only showed interest in the production of the documentary genre. This was in the face of local directors not making appreciable impact in approaching cinema as a commercial venture. The debilitating factors were lack of finance, lack of equipment, non-availability of post-production services, poor distribution network, the looming shadow of foreign productions, and the challenge the cinema faced from television. Moreover, the attitude of government towards the industry was lack of commitment, in addition to unnecessary censorship. Developments in the German film industry, which Bordwell and Thompson (1993) refer to as the “new German cinema,” could be a paradigm for film in Nigeria.

On February 28, 1962, twenty-six non-established film directors came out with what came to be known as the *Oberhausen Manifesto* – a document to press for freedom for local film directors to express themselves in a new language of the cinema devoid of American influence. They did not get immediate response from government; but subsequent lobbying by the signatories and supporters of the manifesto led to the setting up of *Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film* in 1965, a body to help subsidise the production of new films by young German directors. The result was that, as at 1965, non-established film directors could procure up to 300,000 DM interest-free loans on scripts adjudged to be of prospective good film quality (Bordwell & Thompson, 1993, pp. 483-487; Sandford, 1981, p.15). The situation in Nigeria has been a tale of woes, because Nigerian film directors could not look forward to such largesse. Producers could not produce films for television, a situation

that helped the development of the new cinema in Germany. In the analysis of Sandford,

There is thus some irony in the fact that it was television that in the end came to rescue the new cinema... Television, originally the arch-enemy of cinema holds much of the credit for the existence of the New German Cinema as we know it today (Sandford, 1981, p.15).

Many foreign films broadcast on Nigerian television channels like *The Professionals*, *Hawaii 5-0*, *The New Avengers*, *SWAT*, *The Rookies*, *The A-Team*, just to mention a few, were filmed for television. Novels that are bestsellers like *Return to Eden*, *A Woman of Substance*, *Hollywood*, *Scruples*, *Kane and Abel*, *Roots*, *79 Park Avenue*, *Masters of the Game*, and many others, have also been filmed for the television market.

1.2.1 The Glorious Years of the Cinema Industry in Nigeria

It has been observed that the late Ogunde attempted to produce local films in 1945; but the involvement of Nigerians in the cinema industry was actually after independence. For purposes of this study, the period, 1970-1985, would be referred to as the “glorious years” of the cinema industry in Nigeria. This era is taken as glorious, in the sense that, these were the years the cinema convention thrived in Nigeria, to some extent. Shaka states this much when he observes that, “the practice did, of course, enjoy a momentary boom between 1970 and the mid-1980s” (Shaka, 2002, p.11). During this period, the country produced filmmakers like Francis Oladele, Wole Soyinka, Sanya Dosunmu, Ola Balogun, Eddie Ugbomah, Jab Adu, Hubert Ogunde, Jimi Odumosu, Ladi Ladebo, Adeyemi Folayan, Moses Olaiya, Sule Umar, Afolabi Adesanya, Sadiq Balewa, USA Galadima, Brendan Shehu, and Lola Fani-Kayode, among others. Drawing from the analysis of Shaka (2002, p.12), some of the practitioners could be categorised as follows:

- (i) those who had their training from the Accra Film School (Halilu, Fajemisin, Otigba, and Aina, among others);
- (ii) those who had professional Western (American and

- European) training in film production (Balogun, Ugbomah, Oladele, Dosunmu, Galadinma, Adu, Ladebo, and Adesanya, among others);
- (iii) those who started their film production career from the television medium (Odumosu and Fani-Kayode, among others); and
 - (iv) those who migrated from the stage medium (Ogunde, Folayan, Olaiya, and Soyinka, among others).

Some of the feature films produced by the above Nigerian filmmakers in the glorious years include *Dinner with the Devil* (Dosunmu, 1975), *Kongi's Harvest* (Davies, 1970), and *Bullfrog in the Sun* (Pohland, 1971). From the creative fountain of Balogun, there were *Alpha* (1974), *Ajani Ogun* (1976), *Musik Man* (1977), *Black Goddess* (1978), and *Money Power* (1982). Balogun also directed *Jaiyesimi* (1979), *Aiye* (1979), *Aropin N'tenia* (1982) and *Ayanmo* (1983) for Ogunde; *Ija Ominira* (1982) and *Kadara: Destiny* (1982) for Adeyemi Folayan of Ade Love Films; and *Orun Mooru* (1984) and *Mosebolatan* (1985) for Olaiya's Alawada Films. Jab Adu made *Bisi: Daughter of the River* (1977); while Halilu made films like *Shehu Umar* (1976) and *Moment of Truth* (1978). On the other hand, films produced and directed by Ugbomah include *The Rise and Fall of Oyenusi* (1979), *The Boy is Good* (1979), *The Mask* (1979), *Oil Boom* (1980), *Bolus '80* (1982), *Vengeance of the Cult* (1982), and *Death of a Black President* (1983).

The delineation above shows a trend that corroborates the earlier observation that the Nigerian cinema industry only thrived to a large extent in the Western part of the country. Among the many reasons that have been proffered by film scholars to support this development, as noted earlier, is the fact that professional theatre practice was vibrant among the Yoruba. Since the practitioners had ready audiences, they started recording their stage productions into celluloid when the fortunes of the stage reduced. The transition was easy for them because some of them had, before then, started experimenting with multimedia production techniques, resorting to the use of filmed sequences to realise certain special effects in their stage performances. Paradoxically, the works of

the aforementioned filmmakers were not well exposed to Nigerian audiences for such productions to be really appreciated, as against the *mélange* of foreign films that bombarded the cinema and television screens. The latter flooded the Nigerian film market to the extent that they had determinate effect on the production concept and the audience perception of the basic filmic conventions that define an ideal film. Ekwuazi highlights this anomaly when he states that,

Too heavy a dependence on these films (on foreign feature films) has conditioned the Nigerian industry by influencing both the audience and the filmmakers and has consequently conditioned the definition of the production context of the Nigerian film (Ekwuazi, 1987, p.11).

Consequently, the challenge had been how the Nigerian audience and film critics could stop using films produced by more advanced film cultures as parameters to judge Nigerian film productions. This was informed by the fact that,

Foreign films become the films. They become the standard measurement from which the indigenous filmmaker must take his bearings. The more closely his work(s) approximate(s) to the foreign, the more successful, it is presumed, such work(s) are adjudged (Ekwuazi, 1987, p. 34).

It is in the above light that Ekwuazi advocates a comprehensive decolonisation of the African film, where there would be experimentation with “a film language rooted in both traditional pictorial composition and African culture” (Ekwuazi, 1987, p. 50). This, according to him, has to be complimented with indigenisation of the technology and institutions of the cinema – a radical reorganisation and revitalisation. As if taking this argument further, Aig-Imoukhuede (1979) opines that the problem lies in the circumstances surrounding the birth of the film industry in Nigeria. According to him, the pathetic state of the Nigerian film industry was reflective partly of “the Nigerian’s evaluation of that medium in nation-building and the type of unstable foundation laid from colonial times” (Aig-Imoukhuede,

1979, pp. 40-41).

Understandably, African cinema was founded on the basis of countering the erroneous and misleading propaganda of the Whiteman against the blacks/Africans (Anyanwu, 2000, p. 59). There was the tendency to ignore the fact that as a medium of mass communication, films could create social awareness, enhance mass mobilisation, transmit, promote and sell Nigeria's cultural potentials, be a form of advert, earn commercial revenue, and provide employment. Also, films are exponents of the social, political, economic, cultural, and technological standards of the producing country. Thus, their contact with an audience from a different cultural background has some implications. They could arouse the interest of such audiences positively towards the situations or developments so portrayed. In other words, such films would then be transmitting, promoting and preserving the culture, having the likelihood of influencing the audiences' culture through the development of their interest. This position is coterminous with the view of Jarvie that, "what movies offer society, the manner in which it is offered, and its content are inextricably bound up with the condition of industrialisation" (as cited in Ekwuazi, 1993, p. 20). To the foregoing, one could add the social, economic, political, philosophical, cultural, and artistic developments. Most popular cultures children imbibe today, ranging from music, clothes, hairstyles, foods, drinks, and so on, are through their contact with various foreign entertainment media. This apparently explains why the Apartheid regime in South Africa did not allow television broadcasting in its enclave until the repressive government was dismantled. This contention is probably out of the realisation that films have universal appeal and impact. In the analysis of Opubor and Nwuneli (1979), a film can rise above language limitations and cultural barriers because through "the powers of its visual images, its use of music and sound effects," it can "succeed in conveying much the same message to audiences of heterogeneous background" (p.1). Paul Rotha also captures the powerful nature of film thus:

Good films are dangerous. They are dangerous because of their instantaneous impact on the minds and emotions

of the world's citizenry. Educationalists have proved that the visual image makes a deeper impression than the verbal or aural image. In this small country, 30,000,000 people see films every week. They see eighty American films to twenty British or other films. They absorb a large amount of the message or propaganda behind them (Rotha, 1975, p. 170).

In the Hollywood convention, the American dream is projected in such a way that America is seen as the ideal country regardless of the sovereignty or integrity of other countries. Most of the Hollywood war/action films portray America as a dedicated country, ready to sacrifice everything to save just one of its citizens. It is not surprising then that a negative image of the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was always portrayed in American war films. Take *First Blood 1, 2, & 3*, for instance, starring Sylvester Stallone, as Rambo, the star role for which he is best remembered. This multimillion-dollar film shows the lead character, Rambo, exterminating thousands of Russian soldiers single-handedly. Similar things are seen in several war/action films – the Russians, the Germans, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Vietnamese, the West (Red) Indians, or the Africans are always the vanquished. In other words, the American dream is well projected in all Hollywood war/action films, as reflected in the following summation:

The cowboy is the archetypal American hero: in real life he conquered the West; in his celluloid form, he conquered the world. And with the cowboy came Hollywood and all it stood for in film economics and aesthetics (Sandford, 1981, pp.103-104).

Ekwuazi puts it aptly when he states that, “the ultimate function of any film and the auteur’s need to accommodate the exigencies of politics determine what aspect(s) of truth/reality to be mediated, and how” (Ekwuazi, 1987, p. 33). With the melange of foreign films, the bastardisation of the African culture can only be checked, to a large extent, if indigenous filmmakers produce films that would adequately promote the ways of life of Nigerians. This explains why a former Managing Director of the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC), Brendan Shehu, observes

that the cinema in Africa

has gradually become the instrument for the articulation and projection of the dominant beliefs and values of Africa to the world community. An immediate implication of this is the growth of intellectual curiosity on the role of cinema in shaping the culture of Africa and simultaneously, how cinema itself has shaped the culture of Africa (Shehu, 1995, p. 97).

1.2.2 The Collapse of the Cinema Industry in Nigeria

It could be argued that the life-span of the cinema industry in Nigeria was very short; and that very few Nigerians saw films produced by our filmmakers before the collapse of the industry. Many factors contributed to the decline and total collapse of the cinema industry in Nigeria, as follows:

- a. *The Cinema Industry under the Colonial Government:* The colonial administration laid an unstable foundation for the industry in Nigeria. There was overdependence on Europe for facilities and distribution, and the conditions of service in government film production units were not encouraging enough to attract quality personnel.
- b. *Crime Rate:* The urban crime rate at the heel of the fratricidal Nigerian civil war was alarming and made night life near impossible. Cases of armed robbery, rape, and ritual killing became the order of the day; and the attendant level of insecurity made the idea of going out for an evening of entertainment in the cinema theatres very unattractive.
- c. *Deplorable Condition of Cinema Theatres:* Most of the cinema houses were dilapidated, to the extent that they were used as warehouses that did not actually house wares. The emergent new generation Pentecostal churches appeared to have offered the owners of such theatres lifelines by hiring them as places of worship.
- d. *Control of Expatriate Companies:* The distribution and exhibition of cinema was in the hands of well-established foreign companies, which placed Nigerian film producers at disadvantaged positions. Many filmmakers laboured to

exhibit their films because they did not have the financial resources to distribute them widely. The result was that they produced films that were hardly seen by the Nigerian audience.

- e. *Television Not Helping the Cinema Industry*: Television had successfully gate-crashed into millions of homes, changing the thought processes of Nigerians; but it did not contribute positively towards the survival of the cinema industry, as DSTV's Africa Magic channel is doing currently through cable satellite transmission of Nollywood films; and
- f. *Introduction of SAP*: The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), put in place by the Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB) regime in fulfilment of conditionalities for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan, sounded the death knell for the cinema industry among other sectors of the economy. The devaluation of the naira in an already depressed economy meant it became virtually impossible for practitioners to acquire the necessary foreign exchange to meet the peculiar demands of celluloid production – raw stock, cinematographic equipment, colour processing, splicing of films, and so forth.

In the analysis of Shaka, the last factor forced practitioners to find ways of staying afloat to sustain their large families. This is understandable because Yoruba Travelling Theatres were managed from the perspective of family enterprises. The producers/directors were heads of large families while their wives, children and other relations made up the troupes. When they transited to the cinema medium, the livelihood of members of their families depended on whatever income they could make. In the face of the decline of the cinema industry, the first survival strategy adopted by the practitioners was falling back to their old production base of stage dramas or selling video recorded copies of their stage productions. Realising that this approach was unprofitable, they resorted to corporate sponsorship of comedies, or better still, co-productions, as was the case with Ogunde's *Mister Johnson* (Beresford, 1990), shot on location in Jos, Plateau State (Shaka, 2002, pp.14-15).

The question then, as it is now, is whether there were what could be called local films; and how they had thrived in Nigeria. This forms the basis for the seminal work by Ekwuazi, Sokomba and Mgbejume (2001) on the need to make a transition from video to celluloid. This is pathetic because there had been an earlier transition from the cinema to video, and key players are now making a case for producers to transit once again from video to cinema to globalise the industry.

1.3 Television Drama in Nigeria

The place of television drama in the development of the contemporary Nigerian film industry is another phenomenon that needs to be examined. This is premised on the position that the impact Nollywood has made is attributable, to a large extent, on the foundation laid by television drama. This influence is also reflected in the approaches the industry has borrowed from television drama conventions.

In the first place, a television station exists for the sole purpose of beaming various programmes into the homes of its audience, which is heterogeneous. The viewers judge a station by the quality of programmes that emanate from it. Therefore, audiences tune to any station that best satisfies their viewing pleasure; and they have the liberty to tune to other stations at their disposal for alternative programming at any point in the transmission time. This they could do with the touch of a button, now very handy on the remote control. The drama format is one type of programme that influences viewership for any television station.

1.3.1 The Birth of Local TV Drama

The journey of television drama in Nigeria has been a pathetic one. This is attributable to the circumstances surrounding the birth of television in Nigeria – political interests outweighed the real objectives of television broadcasting. This forms the thesis in an earlier study, *Foreign Films in Nigerian Television Programming: A Case Study of Rivers State Television* (Ayakoroma, 1989). In the main, local programmes never occupied predominant positions in the transmission schedules

of television houses because lack of planning, absence of good production facilities, inadequate funding, and lack of trained manpower, among others, were some of the major factors that surrounded their establishment.

Segun Olusola (1981) gives a first-hand account of the pains it took the Western Nigeria Television (WNTV), Ibadan to pioneer local television drama production in Nigeria. Of interest is the fact that Olusola himself produced the first television drama, Soyinka's *My Father's Burden*, which was broadcast live on Sunday, August 6, 1961. Unfortunately, due to inherent technical limitations, as at that time, the drama production was not recorded (Olusola, 1981, pp. 370-380). The above dilemma can be best captured from the perspective of live television coverage of sports or major national events. Many unpleasant things happen – power failure, loss of sound, unsteady or violent camera movements like sudden whip pans, uncontrolled movements across the cameras, studio gossips and wrong cues inadvertently taken on air, to mention a few. The result, most times, could be best described as “transmission of moments of confusion.” Babatunde Jose's review of the production of *My Father's Burden* lucidly captures the historic event:

Those who watched WNTV's first all Nigerian play... may not have realised the difficulties under which it was produced. The studio was not really designed to accommodate such a large production and the players had to step warily to avoid tripping over a web of cables (as cited in Ikime, 1979, p. 7).

Olusola recalls that the production generated quite some tension in the station, as it was “a very incisive criticism of the emerging Nigerian bourgeoisie bribing and corrupting itself through” (Olusola, 1981, p. 372). The management of WNTV was afraid of the big hammer from the government; but in the end, nothing happened and there were sighs of relief. The experience was such that, both the producer, who worked under the restrictions in the government bureaucratic system, and the scriptwriter, who was sceptical of the system, became very wary of each other (Olusola, 1981, p. 372).

1.3.2 *The Soap Opera as a Precursor of Video Films in Nigeria*

The soap opera (or soap, for short) primarily is a TV drama serial. It is a continuous story in which plot and characters unfold gradually. It has many sub-plots and conflicts that have major or common focus. The soap plays on suspense and emotions; thus, it had women as its target audience at its advent. This explains why by their original concept, the target audience of soaps were housewives and were broadcast at daytimes when they would be at home to watch. The convention emphasised stories that revolved around women, thus giving prominence to female lead roles. In addition, advertisements of soaps or detergents made up the bulk of the commercials in the programmes, hence, the term, soap operas. However, when they had gone beyond the women target audience and were viewed by the entire family, they became a source of unity in homes (Ayakoroma, 1995a, p.126).

The soap opera convention is an encapsulation of conflicts, crises, and suspense by instalment in the sense that the action is not ending. It stops every week on a suspended note and viewers would be asking what would likely happen in the next episode. The dramatic experience the audience shares is like a weekly “akawo” or “osusu” (in the local parlance, that is, contribution) to a fund. This is what makes the instalment – the part of the sum paid at regular intervals over a given period; and in this context, it is one of the parts of a serial. How well the scriptwriter creates suspense in the serial, and how well it could sustain audience interest, determine how far the story can continue.

1.3.3 *Mirror in the Sun as Pacesetter*

The fact remains that *Cockcrow at Dawn*, produced/directed by Peter Igbo at NTA Jos, started the soap opera tradition in Nigeria; but it could not be sustained because of the government structure syndrome. It was soon rested until there was a private initiative to keep the flame burning. The advent of the contemporary soap opera convention dates back to January 1984, when Lola Fani-Kayode debuted with *Mirror in the Sun*.

Coming at a time the Nigerian audience had seen television dramas like *The Village Headmaster*, *Masquerade*, *For Better for Worse*, *Samanja*, *Adio's Family*, and *Cockcrow...*, the concept of *Mirror...* was a tonic in their viewing experience. With the broadcast of the first episode on Sunday, January 1, 1984, there was the realisation that given the opportunity—adequate technical facilities and financial support—qualitative local soap operas could be produced in Nigeria (Adesanya, 1984, p. 37).

Fans of *Mirror...* saw in it, exhibition of modern trends in fashion, social life, as well as glamorous ladies and gentlemen who became instant role models. *Mirror...* was also a true reflection of the putrid moral life of the society. However, this creative adventurism, which was the brainchild of Lola Fani-Kayode and her independent production company, Cine Kraft Ltd, was a privately driven venture. Though Fani-Kayode started the project in March 1983, all attempts to get sponsorship proved abortive. Incidentally, there had to be a marriage of convenience between Cine Kraft and NTA for the programme to see the light of day. On seeing the programme, the management of NTA was highly impressed and readily negotiated for co-production. NTA eventually entered *Mirror...* for the 1984 Union of Radio and Television Networks of Africa (URTNA) Competition, held in Dakar, Senegal, and the serial won a second prize (Adesanya, 1984, p. 37).

Louis Jouvet (1963) opines that in any dramatic experience, “a play receives the finishing process of an ordeal by fire through contact with an audience” (Jouvet, 1963, p. 229). In our assessment, *Mirror...* passed this test with ease as viewers looked forward to seeing the slice of life or weekly instalment every Sunday at 8.00 pm on the network service of NTA. As a bold effort in the soap opera format, *Mirror...* launched the status of the independent producer as well as many artists to an enviable position in the history of Nigerian television drama. Such artists included Barbara Soky (Yinka), Nduak Nkanga (Ngozi), Adesua Aluya (Alero), Dela Williams (Soji), Enebeli Elebuwa (Chike), Toma Mason (Patrick), Clarion Chukwura (Tina), Lari Williams (Ladipo), Sam Igue (Mr. Peters, now late), and Gbenga Adefolalu (Afolabi). Others were Sola Adeyemo,

Dan Emeni, Flora Okoduwa, Evans Hunter and Olumide Bakare, who all became worthy ambassadors of the acting profession (Ayakoroma, 1995a, p.130).

Along the line, NTA took over the production of *Mirror...* from Cine Kraft after the first 39 episodes (which is three quarters), and Fani-Kayode handed over the mantle of producer/director to John Ndanusa, a staff of NTA. Unfortunately, only 13 episodes were produced thereafter (which is a quarter), bringing the serial to a total of 52 instalments, as the programme ended abruptly (Ayakoroma, 1995a, p. 128). This happened at a time the audience had developed quite an insatiable appetite for the soap opera. In all of the above, the good thing was that Nigerian independent producers realised that they could capitalise on the propitious audience taste that had been cultivated by developing similar ideas and canvass for sponsorship.

1.3.4 The Aftermath of *Mirror in the Sun*

In the words of Kinjeketile (Hussein, 1968), “a man gives birth to a word ... and the word grows ... it grows bigger than the man who gave it birth.” While credit has to be duly given to Lola Fani-Kayode for her exploits, there is no gainsaying the fact that Nigerian television viewers have seen a *mélange* of local soap operas since then – both “the good, the bad, and the ugly.” A brief survey of this development will portray the level of suspense by instalment the audience had shared on the network service of NTA.

Victims, scripted and produced by Mabel Oboh of Combo Combreeze Productions, came on air in June 1986. Featuring at a time Adielia Onyedibia’s adaptation of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* was also running on the network service of NTA, *Victims* was more of a flash in the pan. Zeb Ejiro, a 1985 NTA Writers’ Workshop participant, was later to create waves in the second week of October 1988 with *Ripples*, a half-hour serial, which edged out *Samanja* on the Friday 8.30-9.00 pm NTA network slot. According to Zeb (as he is popularly called), he shot the pilot episode of *Ripples* and could not get sponsors for many months. It was just a matter of providence that Dr. Victoria Ezeokoli, then Director of Programmes of NTA, walked into the

studio where he was dubbing a copy, and was fascinated with the quality of the production. He disclosed that she called other top management staff of NTA to see the production, stressing that was the kind of programme NTA needed to air at that point in time. In the final analysis, companies that had shut their doors against him when he was canvassing for sponsorship virtually scrambled for the sponsorship of the serial when NTA entered into partnership with him. Consequently, *Ripples* ran for five years, creating a record as the longest running soap opera on the network service of NTA (Ayakoroma, 1995a, p. 129; Ejio, 2005, pp. 1-2).

From Enugu, which was the production base of Chika Okpala's (Chief Zebrudaya) *Masquerade*, Saros International came out with *Basi & Company*, a 30-minute situation comedy (sitcom), created and produced by Ken Saro-Wiwa and directed by Uriel Paul-Worika. The work was based on Saro-Wiwa's *Transistor Radio*, a radio drama that had been produced earlier by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). This sitcom projected artists like Albert Egbe (1st Mr. B.), Zulu Adigwe (2nd Mr. B.), Aso Douglas (Madam de Madam), Tekena Harry Macdonald (Alali), Affiong Usani (1st Segi), Ethel Ekpe (2nd Segi), Timi Zuofa (3rd Segi), Lassa Amoro (Dandy), John Nwaobi (1st Boy Josco), Uzorma Onungwa (2nd Boy Josco), and Emmanuel Okutuate (3rd Boy Josco), among others. *Basi & Company* played on the illusion of a live studio audience, though it used canned laughter to achieve that effect.

A positive development with the enthusiastic audience reception of *Mirror ...* and *Ripples* was that it dawned on the management of NTA that the honeymoon was over. This is in the sense that sponsors like Lever Brothers, PZ Industries, UAC Foods, and Nigerian Breweries, among others, were no longer ready to accept just any programme, unless such productions could compete favourably with others that were running. It was not surprising then that NTA rose to the occasion and came out with *Behind the Clouds*, created, produced and directed by Matt Dadzie, a staff of NTA and one of the star actors of *Cockcrow*.... Shot on location at Jos, Plateau State, the production capitalised on men and materials from the Nigerian

Television College, Jos, artists from the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Jos, and also from the production experience of *Cockcrow*.... Like *Cockcrow*..., *Behind the Clouds* had a signature tune composed specially, reflecting the title and thematic content. Also, most of the key actors, Matt Dadzie, Sadiq Daba, George Menta, Ene Oloja and Dan Emeni, had worked together on the set of *Cockcrow*.... Somehow, *Behind the Clouds* had an edge over *Ripples* at that time because it was a one-hour instalment; so the audience had more satisfying viewing time. Viewers used to liken *Ripples* humorously to a bottle of “small stout” while *Behind the Clouds* was like a bottle of “big stout”, popularly called “odeku” in Nigeria. Unfortunately, *Behind the Clouds* was short-lived because the programme ended prematurely, due largely, to the confusion that hit the camp, following the sudden and painful death of MacArthur Fom, who was playing the role of Nosa (Ayakoroma, 1995a, p.129).

The replacement, which NTA found in *Supple Blues*, created by Paul Emema, produced/directed by John Ndanusa, could not fill the vacuum created by the tragedy that hit *Behind the Clouds*. Furthermore, *Supple Blues* had to compete at that time with another private venture, *Checkmate*, created by Amaka Igwe (nee Isaac Ene) of Moving Movies Ltd. *Checkmate* was an instant success as it became the toast of the over “thirty million viewers” that “cannot be wrong”. Ironically, the producers rested *Checkmate*, when the airtime charged by NTA became exorbitant and a cold war developed between independent television producers and the management of NTA. Nevertheless, it was realised that whatever be the case, “you do not cut your nose to spite your face.” It dawned on all that NTA needed independent producers and vice-versa. Eventually, *Checkmate* came back on the network service of NTA every Thursday at 8.00 pm, this time, produced and directed by Bolaji Dawodu, who had before then directed *The New Masquerade*.

There is no gainsaying the fact that *Checkmate* offered yet another veritable window for more artists to become stars on the tube. Such artists included Ego Nnamani (Ann), Bobmanuel Udokwu (Richie), Francis Agu (Benibo, now late), Richard

Mofe-Damijo (Segun Kadiri), and Kunle Bamtefa (Chief Fuji). Others were Bimbo Odulaja (Nduka, though he now bears Bimbo Manuel), Mildred Iweka (Ada), Norbert Young (Professor), Tunde Euba (Akpan), Uche Osotule (Nkemdilim), Toun Oni (Mama Rabiun), Sola Awojobi (Ireti), and Pauline Njoku (Peace). These actors and actresses all became celebrities, and Nollywood was later to draw from their exploits. However, the happenings in Chief Fuji's polygamous organisation, so to speak, which had provided comic relief in *Checkmate*, have since been made into a TV serial, titled *Fuji House of Commotion*. The situation comedy, which is currently running on Africa Independent Television (AIT), is also from the stable of Amaka Igwe's Moving Movies Ltd.

In the face of the overshadowing influence of independent producers, NTA came out with *Blossom*, created by Kenneth Amanze, and produced/directed by Danladi Bako. Another production, *Fortunes*, was later to take the place of *Blossom* because it (*Blossom*) could not survive the stiff competition. While *Fortunes* made an impact with the aggressive and Amazonian Tokunbo (Regina Askia) and her sugar daddy husband, Fred (Layi Ashadele, who staged a comeback after the good old days of *The Village Headmaster*, where he starred as Lakunle Ojo), it soon went into oblivion. Though the programme had resurfaced as *Mega Fortunes*, it was also short-lived. There were some problems in the production arrangement, which even degenerated to a legal tussle (Ejoro, 2005, p. 2). In its place, *Shadows*, produced and directed by Dan Emeni, attempted to find a place in the hearts of the viewers. As a versatile actor, who was in *Cockcrow...*, *Mirror...* and *Behind the Clouds*, and one who was also involved in the scripting and directing of *Behind the Clouds*, Emeni had the requisite experience to give viewers a dose of the weekly instalment (Ayakoroma, 1995a, p. 132). Somehow, developments in the entertainment terrain created diversions for Nigerian audiences – the advent of the contemporary film industry, Nollywood, capitalising on the ease of the video format for productions.

1.3.5 *The Decline of the Soap Opera in Nigeria*

The soap opera tradition suffered certain hiccups, which again necessitated further experimentations. Some of the major factors, which militated against the sustenance of the TV soap opera tradition, can be delineated as follows:

- a) *Foreign Soap Operas*: There was a melange of foreign soaps, which became a threat to local soaps on the network service of NTA. Programmes like *The Rich also Cry*, *Isaura*, *Egoli: The Place of Gold*, *Secret of the Sand*, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Wild Rose*, *Maria de Los Angeles*, among others, became very popular with Nigerian audiences. These were programmes that were no longer running on foreign television stations and were cheaper for Nigerian television stations to acquire. Needless to say that it was more like a replay of the dilemma of Nigerian broadcast managers at the birth of television when the foreign partners argued that they could teach and entertain the Nigerian audience with their programmes rather than local programmes.
- b) *Sponsorship*: Corporate bodies like AJ Seward, PZ Industries, Lever Brothers, UAC Foods, and Nigerian Breweries, among others, decided to sponsor such foreign novellas to the detriment of local soaps. In other words, there appeared to be no incentives or guarantees and this did not encourage independent producers.
- c) *Attitude of NTA Management*: The management of NTA, the only television network in the country, which enjoyed all the monopoly, and the self-acclaimed largest television network in Africa, suddenly adopted an uncompromising stance. It increased air time charges on programmes placed by independent TV producers, and was adamant when there were representations for such rates to be reviewed.
- d) *Introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)*: The introduction of SAP affected the broadcast industry, like other sectors of the economy, as procurement of broadcast equipment and accessories became herculean.
- e) *The Rise of Video Film Productions*: The advent of Nollywood was the last straw that broke the camel's back. Producers

felt more at home with the opportunities offered by the emergent video format and went for it. The implication of the migration of the television trained producers/directors meant diminished quality of subsequent soaps.

In the face of the aforementioned factors, among others, it was not surprising that television drama productions experienced a steady decline. This is not to ignore the enviable place and contributions of dramas like Wale Adenuga's *Super Story* and Amaka Igwe's *Fuji House of Commotion*, which have been running for a long time, and have received very wide viewership across the country in the past few years. *Super Story*, for example, has received many awards, and also adjudged the "Best TV Drama" at the 2004 edition of the Nigerian Media Merit Award.

From the foregoing, it has been established that the soap opera tradition provided a good breeding ground for the fertilisation of Nollywood in Nigeria. This is in the sense that,

- (i) it gave rise to a new crop of scriptwriters;
- (ii) it made many artistes popular;
- (iii) it charted the course for the generic development that the audience would appreciate in the film industry; and
- (iv) it provided an avenue for independent TV producers to reach mutual understanding, to the extent that they could call the bluff of NTA and look for alternative avenues to ply their craft.

In spite of the indices, it needed someone, as it were, to bell the cat; it needed someone with the vision and the courage to look beyond the surface and produce a film in the video format that would break ethnic barriers. The man who achieved this quintessential feat is Kenneth Nnebue, who with his Nek Video Links, came out with *Living in Bondage* (Mordi, 1992). He did not know that he was planting the seed for an industry that would overwhelm everybody, and provide sources of livelihood to millions of Nigerians, in no distant time.

1.4 The Development of Nollywood: The Contemporary Nigerian Film Industry

Nigerian film scholars acknowledge the fact that the collapse of the cinema industry paved way for experimentations in the video film format. Adesanya (1997), Balogun (1998), Haynes (1997), and Shaka (2002; 2003; 2004), for instance, identify the major factors that gave rise to the use of the video format for film productions, which include the introduction of SAP, the economics of celluloid production, poor distribution and exhibition channels for film productions, the rise of urban crime after the Nigerian civil war, the dilapidation of cinema theatres and their becoming dens of robbers or at best taken over by new generation churches, and the rise and development of television drama as a source of family entertainment. This was the atmosphere under which Yoruba Travelling Theatre companies started recording their stage performances on video for sale in the 1970s and 1980s, later graduating to direct recording of such productions on celluloid for exhibition in cinema houses. Some Igbo electronic dealers, like Kenneth Nnebue, saw the prospects in that business, and started with the production of Yoruba language films. According to Haynes (1997, p. 24), Nnebue himself had attempted packaging Yoruba films for sale, when he produced *Aje Ni Iya Mi* for Sola Oguniola, with the sum of two thousand naira and made quite some profit.

From the eastern part of the country, Solomon Eze (aka Mike Oriehedinma) is said to have pioneered video film productions in the mid-80s (Nnennyelike, 2005, pp. 1-4; Shaka, 2002, p.15); but his productions were merely improvised scenarios, which have been likened to Onitsha Market Literature (Haynes & Okome, 1997, p. 32). Paradoxically, Afolabi Adesanya attributes the success of Igbo and Pidgin/English video films to the uncanny similarity of their stories and thematic emphases to the Onitsha Market Literature (Adesanya, 1997, p.19). Furthermore, some Enugu-based theatre artists like Chiwetalu Agu and Roy Denani recorded some local dramas on video for sale to viewers in Enugu and Onitsha (Agu & Denani, personal communication, July 3, 2005). Ebere Iheanacho, then a producer/director with NTA Aba, also attempted producing dramas on video, collaborating

with one of his colleagues, Ndubuisi Okoh. Using Catwalk Productions, as the production outfit, the duo produced video films like *Coat of Many Colours* and *Missing Mask*.

Innocent Ohiri, Director of Wizzi Travelling Theatre, a Port Harcourt-based theatre group (in collaboration with some video film sellers in Onitsha), also attempted packaging some films woven around his *Hot Cash* television serial, popularly called “Willy-Willy.” Though a staff of NTA Port Harcourt then, he packaged the video films under his production company, Lilino Ventures. As a point of fact, Ohiri was among the first television producers/directors in Nigeria to experiment and popularise vanishing effects of characters in local television drama productions, just through the simple use of jump cuts. Tade Ogidan did it convincingly with *Abiku*, an NTA Lagos tele-drama he produced/directed, a production that won some awards. Ohiri did it commendably, within the technical limitations at that time, with the disappearing acts of the ghost of Willy-Willy, a character he (Ohiri) played and a name that his fans still call him up till today, more than twenty years after. The productions were, more or less, video recordings and were happening at a time soap operas had received wide audience acceptance. Incidentally, the attempt by Ohiri did not create much impact, a situation that is attributable to the quality, scope, and limited circulation of the video films.

The business prospects of the contemporary Nigerian film industry received closer attention when Kenneth Nnebue came out with *Living in Bondage* (Mordi, 1992), an Igbo language film, which was an instant hit. Coincidentally, the success of Nnebue’s experiment was at a time independent TV producers were not enjoying the best of relationships with the authorities of NTA. As mentioned earlier, the management of NTA was wont to drop many local soap operas showing on its network service, in favour of Mexican and other foreign soaps, which were cheaper to acquire. This, of course, was more of a replay of the circumstances that precipitated the preponderance of foreign films in television programming in developing countries, at inception. The dilemma of Ghana is highlighted by Robert Shayon (1983) thus:

Ghana originally planned to operate its TV system with more than 80 per cent of its own programs, mostly educational. The planners were determined not to develop appetite for cowboy pictures. The only trouble was that the money supply was not there to sustain them. With less than 15,000 sets in the country, the annual license fee of \$12 could not provide enough revenue. After a while, Ghanaian TV began to accept advertising and as a corollary, the advertisers demanded popular shows. So the floodgates to the West opened after all; today Ghana's TV service provides only 40 per cent of its output (as cited in Nam, 1983, p. 216).

The emergent film industry became an avenue through which Nigerian television producers/directors could readily direct their energies to and call the bluff of NTA. This underpins the position that the video format, which ushered in Nollywood, rode on the back of the successes of local television drama productions. In other words, the positive impact of the early video films in Nigeria was as a result of the way the Nigerian public had received local soap operas. The films were more like television dramas (like *For Better for Worse*, *Play of the Week*, or *Zonal Special*) packaged in video tapes for home viewing, at the audience's convenience. With *Living in Bondage*, Nnebue heralded the language genre. The film portrayed the get-rich-quick mentality of Nigerians, where the affluence and ostentatious living of socialites were applauded; while tight budgetary spending by an individual was seen derogatorily as, "araldite syndrome." The film also exhibited the strange belief and preponderance of ritual practices in Nigeria, specifically among Igbo traders, who most times depended on supernatural means for breakthroughs in their businesses.

As a point of fact, popular TV soap opera artists like Kenneth Okonkwo, Bobmanuel Udokwu, late Francis Agu, and late Jennifer Okere featured in *Living in Bondage*, and this influenced its positive audience reception. The success meant consequent exodus of stars from the TV medium, which immediately lost artists to the emergent industry. Television-trained producers/directors, like Chris Obi-Rapu, Chika Onu, Zeb Ejoro, Amaka Igwe, Ndubuisi Okoh, Andy Amenechi, Tade Ogidan, Fred

Amata, Chico Ejio, Tunji Bamisigbin, and Bolaji Dawodu, among others, found fulfilment in the privately driven industry. As it is with every business opportunity, the success of *Living in Bondage* also saw several Idumota (Lagos) and Upper Iwaka Road (Onitsha) traders – electronic, cement, and spare part dealers – abandoning such businesses and pooling their resources to produce Igbo language films. This is reflective of the “instanmatic” and “polaroid” nature of Nigerians, as Rotimi (1988, p. ix) put it. Nigerians are more interested in instant returns and instant miracles, not prospects or promises. The unfortunate thing in this development is that the industry became a jungle, where just anything could happen, so long as those who funded the productions went smiling to the banks. Nonetheless, through this “trial and error” approach, certain structures or frameworks have been erected over the years; and this informs the need to attempt rational or logical explanations to the realities on ground. One of such developments is the application of genres in the industry.

1.5 The Context of Production in Nollywood

The point has been made that Nollywood started as an experimental business venture. As a result of the line of business the early entrants were involved in, it was not surprising that they have had a stranglehold on the emergent industry. This explains their reluctance in opening it up for big-time investors. It is believed that this may be probably for fear of losing their grip on the soul of the industry. The question is: For how long will this continue? When will Nollywood enter into the league of the organised private sector (OPS)?

The business of contemporary Nigerian film production is in the hands of a group of practitioners, called, the executive producers (EPs). They are the financiers of the many films which are churned out daily. At inception, they merely provided the funds and depended on trained producers/directors to produce scripts of their choice. The scripts were generated by the producers/directors, or sometimes the EPs. A film production or project is referred to as *job*, because of the business angle from which the EPs looked at the industry (Ejio, personal

communication, Nov. 9, 2005; Imasuen, personal communication, Jan. 18, 2006). Thus, practitioners say there is a job belonging to an EP that had just come up. The idea has even caught up with trained artists, as they also now refer to roles they have been contracted to perform in given films as, jobs (Dede, personal communication, July 21, 2007; Dominic, personal communication, Jan. 18, 2006). Over the years, the industry has established its own star system; but such film stars are called “selling faces” by the EPs. They are referred to as selling faces because the inclusion of such artists meant increased sale of such films. The EPs thus decide as to which selling faces to use and which new faces to introduce in given films. The corollary, like the family businesses that the Yoruba Travelling Theatres practised, is that some EPs force their wards or girlfriends on producers/directors; and they always have their way because, as the saying goes, “He who pays the piper dictates the tune.”

The films were also expected to come out in the shortest possible time. This development is understandable because, as stated earlier, the EPs were predominantly traders who were involved in buying and selling, and have had to invest their savings on film productions. Since most of them pooled their resources together to produce a film, it was natural for them to presume that the quicker they got returns on investments, the better; and the profit could be put into yet another film project or job. The implication here is that directors were hounded into guaranteeing that a production would be finished in just a few days, in order for the EP to recoup his money. It gave rise to what has come to be known as, *kpa kpa kpa* (quick quick quick) directors (Ejoro, personal communication, July 24, 2004).

It is interesting that the EPs have gradually transformed into producers/directors. There are actually three schools of thought regarding this development. Firstly, this has been attributed to the fraudulent inclination (the popular ‘419’ attitude) of the early producers, into whose hands the EPs had entrusted their funds. It was said to have started when producers tried to assure the EPs that their investments on film projects were bound to yield returns. The directors started asking them (the Eps) to

visit film locations to see how the cast and crew were working hard to shoot given jobs. Unfortunately, this appeared to have also exposed the underhand deals of some crooked producers. As officers in charge of below-the-line costs in the business of film production, the producers negotiated artist fees with the cast and crew and collected such monies from the EPs. The EPs were later to realise that such fees never got down the line to the artists, as some producers either short-changed artists, not paying them in full or never paid them at all. Instead, they used such monies to buy flashy cars, carry girls of loose virtue, and go nite-clubbing. The EPs then realised the need to protect their investments, which were products of many years of labour or savings (Ajayi, 2005, p. 2).

Secondly, there is the view, as opined by Zeb Ejiro, that the producers meant well by inviting the EPs to locations to see what they were doing. According to him, it was all in the spirit of transparency, to build confidence in the EPs. He noted that it was ironical that this gesture gave the EPs adequate insight into the practical aspects of film production; and they seized the opportunity with two hands to learn the craft practically. Having seen what the so-called professionals were doing and confident that they could manage, the EPs did not hesitate in taking over the actual business of film production all in the bid to cut corners.

Thirdly, it is believed that the transformation of the EPs to producers/directors was a case of jealousy or envy. Ejiro also maintains that, seeing that the standard of living of producers improved with every production, which is to be expected, the EPs felt they were making the producers and directors rich, and so moved in to save some money. They started by understudying the production process personally, or simply introducing their wards to work with producers/directors, as apprentices (production assistants). After two or three productions, such an apprentice tells his master (the EP) that he was ready to handle a production on his own. He gives him, maybe, half or just a quarter of the amount he would have paid an established producer/director for the job. The apprentice does the production, with whatever artistic or technical flaws; but the

EP is happy that he had saved some money. Unfortunately, it has become the norm, as the EPs find various avenues to maximise profits (Ejiro, personal communication, Nov. 9, 2005).

As a matter of fact, the taking over of the production process by the EPs has had some implications on the contemporary Nigerian film industry, which can be delineated as follows:

- (i) *Unlimited Powers of Executive Producers*: The EPs could decide what happened in the industry in the sense that they had taken their destiny in their hands.
- (ii) *Maximisation of Profits*: Since they were answerable only to themselves, they were interested more in maximising profits, and hardly bothered about the artistic or technical quality of their film productions.
- (iii) *Background of the Marketers*: Most of the EPs were hardly educated; thus, there were serious limitations in their concepts and approaches to marketing. They were satisfied with whatever little quick returns they could make from productions.
- (v) *Back-to-Back Productions*: In moves which are reminiscent of the dynamics of buying and selling they were used to, they quickly ploughed such returns back into another production. This has given rise to back-to-back productions and as many productions an EP can churn out at any given time.
- (v) *Creation of Stars*: The EPs had the wherewithal to create stars out of artists. Since a greater number of the EPs are Igbo presently, there are as many Igbo star actors and actresses, many of them without professional theatre training.
- (vi) *Rise of Artist Fees*: In obedience to the economic forces of demand and supply, the EPs, in the bid to undercut each other, priced artists out of the rooftops in order to secure the services of such preferred stars or selling faces. If an EP is known to have paid a star artist the sum of five hundred thousand naira, another EP pays say six hundred thousand naira into such a star artist's bank account and offers him/her a film script. This, of course, is one of the basics in the business of buying and selling, which the Igbo

- traders were used to – you sell to the highest bidder.
- (vii) *Release Dates*: The EPs determined the times new films could be released into the market – weekly, fortnightly, or monthly – depending on the prevailing market situation. This they embarked on when there was a glut in the market, and necessitated the break foisted on the industry in 2002.
 - (viii) *Rise of Support Services*: They have created an enabling atmosphere for the rise of professional support artists like artistic directors, cinematographers, location managers, costumiers, and make-up artists, to mention a few, as they negotiated directly with these set of crews for their services; and
 - (ix) *Domineering Influence of Executive Producers*: The EPs metamorphosed into a very strong cartel that could ban or unban star artists and place a ceiling on artist fees, as occurred in October 2004. The affected artists were Richard Mofe-Damijo (RMD), Pete Edochie, Sam Dede, Genevieve Nnaji, Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde and Stella Damasus-Aboderin. Others were Ramsey Noah, Jim Iyke, Emeka Ike, Kenneth Okonkwo (who is also a marketer), Nkem Owoh, and Tchidi Chikere (the only director among the lot). When they (the marketers) called the affected persons for a meeting in October 2005, those that attended, namely, Ramsey Noah, Jim Iyke, Emeka Ike, Kenneth Okonkwo, Nkem Owoh and Tchidi Chikere, were let off the hook. The remaining artists, Richard Mofe-Damijo, Pete Edochie, Sam Dede, Genevieve Nnaji, Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde, and Stella Damasus-Aboderin, were at the “mercy” of the marketers until one year later before they got a reprieve to stage a comeback.

Theo Akatugba, for instance, produced and directed several movies in Nollywood, including, *Divine Connection* (1993), a Yoruba language film, *Agbara Ife* (1994), *Blood on My Hands* (1996), *Blood on My Hands Pt. II* (1997), *Irony* (1997), *Dilemma* (1998), *Savage* (1999), and *Double Bond* (2000) with his Theoseg Productions Company; but he was frustrated due to the problems associated with the marketers in the industry. He eventually “checked out” with his family in 2001 to settle in

Accra, Ghana and establishing Point Blank Media Concepts Ltd to carry on the business of Film/Television production, distribution and advertising. The fact remains that, Theo Akatugba has contributed immensely to the development of Ghollywood, the film industry in Ghana.

In spite of the positive developments, there is the thinking in some quarters that the contemporary Nigerian film industry is in dire need of global recognition. This informed the Nigerian Film Corporation's advocacy for stakeholders to make an inevitable transition from video back to celluloid. Though a veteran like Eddie Ugbomah has joined the bandwagon by producing films in the video format to remain relevant in the industry, he is still very sceptical about the video craze, cynically dubbing practitioners, videographers, as opposed to filmmakers. Ladi Ladebo, on the other hand, has taken a clear stand – it is film production on celluloid or never. According to Iwenjora, as a very strong advocate of the celluloid format, Ladebo states that, “I am passionate about celluloid films. It is what ranks you as a true filmmaker in the international market” ((Iwenjora, 2003, p. 20). The interesting thing is that Ladebo appreciates the dilemma of the producers of video films:

There is nothing wrong with the video film ... There is the reality that we all have to face. One has to be very pragmatic. Young men and women in that genre are very pragmatic. There is no money to make movies and if the money exists, it would have to come from somebody's pocket who could invest it somewhere else if he so wishes. If he puts it in film, he would expect to make it back ... So when they go on video, they are being pragmatic and practical (Iwenjora, 2003, p. 20).

Incidentally, Ladebo's *Heritage* (2003) cost as high as twenty million naira. This was even when the equipment were supplied free of charge by the French Embassy as part of their sponsorship. As it were, there is actually nothing to cheer about the development because Ladebo could only manage to shoot in **16mm** format as against the **35mm** format, which was the case in the glorious years of the cinema. It is even more pathetic that, as at 2003, *Heritage* was the third indigenous feature film

shot on the 16mm format in 15 years, the others being Ola Makinwa's *Agbo Meji*, and Bankole Bello's *Oselu*. Three other films, *A Barber's Wisdom* (Amaka Igwe, 1998), *A Place Called Home* (Mahmood Ali-Balogun, 1998), and *Twins of the Rainforest* (Odion P. Agboh, 1998) were all short feature films sponsored by the South African pay television, M-Net (Ayorinde, 2003, p. 45). The redeeming thing, however, is that the Cross River State Government sponsored a film, *Amazing Grace* (Jeta Amata, 2005), which was shot on **35mm**; and the film won the Best West African Film award at the 2006 Screen Nations Awards UK. It is believed, rightly, that practitioners in the industry will follow the example to shoot on **35mm**.

1.6 The Issue of Film Censorship in Nollywood

Perhaps one issue that has been contentious in Nollywood is the question of censorship. This problem came to the fore when Roseline Odeh assumed duty as the Director-General of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB). The controversy arose because the leadership of the Board under Odeh appeared not to have differentiated between personal inclinations and the professional demands of the Office of the Censor. In order to put the contentious issue in proper perspective, it is necessary to briefly examine the nature and history of censorship, the enabling law as enacted in Nigeria, and how the phenomenon has impacted on the development of Nollywood.

Basically, censorship is "the institution or practice of censoring" (Webster's, 1996, p.159). It is the act of suppressing publications or excising any matter in them thought to be immoral, seditious or otherwise undesirable by a person empowered by an enabling law. Konvitz (1998, p.1) seems to put it mildly first when he defines censorship as, "the supervision and control of information and ideas circulated among people in a society." He goes further to expatiate that in modern use, censorship refers to:

the examination of books, periodicals, plays, films, television and radio program(me)s, news reports, and other communication media for the purpose of altering or suppressing parts thought to be objectionable or offensive. The objectionable material may be considered immoral or obscene, heretical or blasphemous, seditious or treasonable, or injurious to national security (Konvitz, 1998, p.1).

The proponents of film censorship are of the view that the act of censoring films protects the moral values that are prevalent in society; thus, it reflects our values. The rationale for the above, as Konvitz further states, is the necessity to protect three basic social institutions: the family, the church, and the state. On the other hand, those who are opposed to the practice argue that censorship imposes the values of certain people (the censors), who do not respect the generality of the public (the audience), as if the people are incapable of mature, safe responses to what the censor may regard as, “immoral” materials. Their position is that people should know and discern what kinds of films they would like to watch, and not some other person taking that decision for them (Konvitz, 1998, p. 2). From whatever perspective one looks at it, the fact remains that censorship arose out of the concern for certain treatments in productions in the film industry, which include:

- * Sexual content
- * Violence and sadism
- * Glamorization of certain dangerous weapons
- * Ill-treatment of animals or children
- * Portrayal of imitable, dangerous or criminal techniques
- * Blasphemous statements
- * Moral values or public taste
- * Strong political views that could create panic or unnecessary alarm, among others
- * Racism; and
- * Sexism

It can be deduced from the above that the essence of censorship is to protect the public from being exposed to injurious information or ideas unnecessarily, and making the

communication medium to be more responsive to perceived social ideals. It stands to reason then that the absence of censorship presupposes that a newspaper, for example, could publish just anything; that a musician could say anything he likes in the lyrics of his songs; that a filmmaker could release any film irrespective of the thematic preoccupation, plot structure, or production approach; and that a marketer could just promote his works the way he likes, whether he is assaulting the sensibilities of the viewers or not. Some analysts have argued that even under democratic set-ups, a high level of permissiveness in the arts and the media “debases public taste, corrupts all sense of decency and civility, and even undermines civilization” (Konvitz, 1998, p. 2).

According to Ekwuazi, the censor in the film industry has two major functions: “to ensure that the film is not used as a weapon to destroy the present social order; and to help the film grow as a medium of expression – by helping the film to realise more of its potential for good” (Ekwuazi, 1987, p. 96). He further states that arguments against censorship revolve around three premises: first, that censors have no interest whatsoever in helping the film to grow as a medium of expression; second, that as a weapon of state control, censorship is used to make people conform ideologically within the sociopolitical community; and third, censorship does not make a good film (Ekwuazi, 2005, pp. 96-97). The following statement is an apt encapsulation of the aforementioned issues:

Most people’s views on censorship depend on the context. ... at one end there is the view that the media, including cinema, influence people and teach behaviour, like the hypodermic needle injecting ‘effects’ into passive viewers. At the other end, there is the anti-censorship view, which feels that we are able to understand texts as works of fiction or art; if an individual commits an act of violence in response to a media experience, then the psychological condition of the perpetrator is the problem, not the film. In between are those ... who think that classification is needed and those who believe that some kinds of films might be ‘harmful,’ but that others are not (“Censorship and film,” p. 4).

Nigerians have had a fair share of the experience in censorship in the film industry as well as the broadcast and print media. The introduction of newspapers, radio and television broadcasting brought to the fore the need for government to check the powers of these organs. It can be recalled that government had been wary of allowing radio and television media into private hands because of their powerful nature. The thinking was that if private broadcast media were not handled properly, the country could be thrown into chaos. This explains why successive military dictatorships in Nigeria continued to clamp down on media houses once their publications, news items, or programmes, were seen to be “in bad taste,” “subversive,” “would raise unnecessary alarm,” or “bring those in leadership positions to disrepute.” There have been cases of closures of media houses under one guise or the other. For instance, sealing off of *National Concord*, *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *Newswatch Magazine* at different times. On Saturday, August 21, 2004, ITV, Benin was closed down for broadcasting martial music in honour of a late presenter in the station, when such music is usually reserved in Nigeria for military coups or serious threats to the nation’s stability (“Censorship and film,” p.1). The closure of Africa Independent Television, AIT, over the Breaking News on the Saturday, October 22, 2005 ill-fated Bellview Airlines plane crash in Lisa, Ogun State, in which all 117 passengers on board lost their lives is another case in point (Anaba, Abdullahi, & Onyeaku, 2005, p.1; Ijwo, 2006, pp. 51-61). On Wednesday, November 30, 2005, Bayelsa State Broadcasting Corporation, Glory FM 97.1 Radio, Yenagoa, was sealed up during the crisis that enveloped the state when the former governor, DSP Alamiyeseigha, jumped bail in London and escaped to the country (“MRA condemns closure of Bayelsa Radio,” 2005, p.1). The closure of a radio station, Rhythm 93.7, Port Harcourt on Saturday, December 17, 2005, and the arrest of the reporters for a false alarm over a news item on purported collapse of Choba Bridge, near the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State (“Reporters without borders,” 2005, p.1), are also some cases of government’s panic measures to check the supposed excesses of broadcast media

houses. Needless to say that these were actions reflective of military dictatorships, as necessary laws subsist for perpetrators to be appropriately brought to book.

However, measures geared towards the regulation of the film industry dates back to the *Theatre and Public Performance Ordinance* (1912). According to Shaka (2004), the law failed to reach the Legislative Council because of the strong opposition that followed. By 1933, the *Cinematographic Ordinance No. 20* was passed into law by the Council. Titled, *An Ordinance for the Better Regulation of Cinematograph and Similar Exhibitions and Posters Exhibiting Such Exhibitions, and Purposes Connected Therewith*, the law became effective April 1, 1934, and applied to Lagos Colony and the rest of Nigeria. Consequent upon this, a Censorship Committee was selected from the Board of Censors in 1934 (Shaka, 2004, p. 290). The Ordinance was amended in 1934, 1941, 1944, and 1945; it was changed again to the *Cinematograph (Film Censorship) Regulation Act* (1963); and with its coming into effect on April 1, 1964, it replaced all existing film censorship laws. The law was operated through the Federal Film Censorship Board. While Parts I and III of the law applied throughout Nigeria, Part II applied only to Lagos (Shaka, 2004, p. 290). Furthermore, Ekwuazi highlights efforts at updating or changing the *Cinematograph Act* of 1963, as it affected censorship. Some of them include a committee set up by government in 1979, a recommendation of the Association of Film Production Companies in 1980, and the Bayo Oduneye review panel under the Buhari/Idiagbon regime (Ekwuazi, 1987, pp. 97-102). The Federal Film Censors Board was vested with the responsibility of approving all films (foreign and local) exhibited or meant for exhibition in the country. Films approved were not to:

- * undermine national security
- * induce or reinforce corruption of private and public morality
- * encourage illegal or criminal acts
- * expose peoples of African descent to ridicule or contempt; and
- * encourage racial, religious or ethnic discrimination and

conflict.

According to Ekwuazi, three ratings subsisted then:

- * 'A' – passed for exhibition to children under **16** only when accompanied by an adult
- * 'U' – passed for universal exhibition
- * 'X' – passed for exhibition when no child under **16** is present (Ekwuazi, 1987, p.101).

Also, the Board had three options in the handling of censorship matters:

- * approve a film for exhibition;
- * approve the film for exhibition subject to some corrections, alterations or excisions; and
- * refuse to approve it or ban it outright (Ekwuazi, 1987, pp. 101-102).

However, the subsisting law in Nigeria is the *National Film and Video Censors Board Decree No. 85 of 1993*, which was signed into law by President Ibrahim Babangida in Abuja on August 23, 1993. The functions of the Board are stipulated in section 2 as follows:

- a) to license
 - i) a person to exhibit films and video works
 - ii) a premises for the purposes of exhibiting films and video works;
- b) to censor films and video works;
- c) to regulate and prescribe safety precautions to be observed in licensed premises;
- d) to regulate and control cinematographic exhibitions; and
- e) to perform such other functions as are necessary or expedient for the full discharge of all or any of the functions conferred on it by this Decree (*Censors Board Decree*, 1993, p. 3).

It goes on to state in Part VII, section 34 (1) that, “no person shall exhibit, cause or allow to be exhibited a film without a censorship certificate issued by the Board for such exhibition” (*Censors Board Decree*, 1993, p.16). The penalty for contravention of the above is negligible, though the law was

promulgated in 1993:

A person in breach of the provision of subsection (1) of this section, is guilty of an offence and is liable to a fine of ₦5,000 or to imprisonment for a term of one year (Section 34(2)) (*Censors Board Decree*, 1993, p.17).

However, in reaching a decision on any film submitted for approval, the Film Censors Committee ensures that,

- (a) Such a film has an educational or entertainment value, apart from promoting the Nigeria culture, unity and interest; and
- (b) That such a film is not likely:
 - (i) to undermine national security; or
 - (ii) to induce or reinforce the corruption of private or public morality; or
 - (iii) to encourage or glorify the use of violence; or
 - (iv) to expose the people of African heritage to ridicule or contempt; or
 - (v) to encourage illegal or criminal acts; or
 - (vi) to encourage racial, religious or ethnic discrimination or conflict; or
 - (vii) by its contents to be blasphemous or obscene (section 37 (1)) (*Censors Board Decree*, 1993, pp.18-19).

Also, section 37(2) of the *Decree* states that the Committee will not approve a film, which in its opinion depicts any matter that is

- (a) indecent, obscene or likely to be injurious to morality; or
- (b) likely to incite or encourage public disorder or crime; or
- (c) undesirable in the public interest (*Censors Board Decree*, 1993, p.19).

Of interest is the proviso in Section 40(1) that the Committee may, “at any time, order the withdrawal of a film from exhibition for the purpose of further censorship if it is satisfied that such withdrawal is necessary in the public interest” (*Censors Board Decree*, 1993, p. 40). This implies that if a film is released, and there is public outcry, probably because of certain aspects that may not be in good taste, the Committee could pick up the

scissors again to expunge such areas, and the producer has no say. In line with international regulatory standards, the enabling law enumerates eight classifications for approved films in section 42(1), and that the Committee shall state in the certificate issued either in full or by the use of the following symbols:

- (a) '**G**' to indicate for General Exhibition;
- (b) '**C**' to indicate Intended particularly for Children;
- (c) '**NC 12**' to indicate Not Recommended for Children below **12**;
- (d) '**PG**' to indicate for Parental Guidance;
- (e) '**18**' to indicate for Mature Audiences;
- (f) '**18**' to indicate Violence;
- (g) '**18**' to indicate Rituals;
- (h) '**RE**' to indicate for Restricted Exhibition;
- (i) '**NTBB**' to indicate Not To Be Broadcast;
- (j) '**SFB**' to indicate Safe For Broadcast (*Censors Board Decree*, 1993, p. 20).

As noted earlier, the implementation of the enabling law, most especially during the tenure of Mrs. Roseline Odeh, was a cause for concern in Nollywood. Odeh took over from Ademola James in 2001, and on the expiration of her tenure in 2005, she handed over to Emeka Mbah. The criticisms that trailed her tenure stemmed from the realisation that instead of helping the industry to grow, the Board was stifling creativity. Since it started operations in 1994, the Board has registered, classified and censored many films (*Film & Video Directory in Nigeria*, 2002; 2004).

The major complaints from practitioners centred on indiscriminate directives by the Board to expunge lines, shots, and sometimes whole scenes from films, or outright refusal to approve films. Sam Dede lists some films banned by the Board for one reason or the other, which include *Shattered Home*, *Outkast 1 & 2*, *Night Out: Girls for Sale*, *Omo Empire*, *Issakaba 4*, *Oracle 3*, *Terrorist Attack* and *Unforeseen Forces* (Dede, 2004, pp. 34-35). Little wonder then that Helen Ukpabio, a Christian evangelist and owner of Liberty Films, decided to dare the Board

for banning *Rapture 1 & 2*, on the excuse that she parodied a religious sect, the Catholic faith, in the film. She went ahead to release the film without any certificate, in contravention of section 34(1). Any breach of the above provision, according to section 34(2), was an offence liable to a fine of five thousand naira or imprisonment for a term of one year upon conviction. Incidentally, Ukpabio was exonerated at the end, as she won the protracted legal battle. To media watchers, this action of the Censors Board was an exercise in futility, which further showed its high-handedness and overzealousness.

To many a film producer, the fear of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVB) under the leadership of Roseline Odeh, was the beginning of wisdom and unhindered business in the industry. It was not surprising then that discussions with some practitioners on the development of Nollywood suddenly became moody once the issue of censorship was raised. The angst, which pervaded such sessions, painted a foreboding future for the industry unless there was an intervention. Charles Awurum, an actor and director, and a Theatre Arts graduate from the University of Calabar, Nigeria, narrated his experience:

Whenever I think of the Censors' Board, I want to cry because they are helping to destroy the industry. For instance, in my film, *King and the Crown*, I was supposed to put a baby in a basket and float it in the river like the case of Moses; they opposed it. They restrict us from portraying reality and talents. They should allow us to do our job (Awurum, personal communication, July 2, 2004).

Teco Benson, director of the award-winning Christian pacesetter, *The Price*, which he produced for Helen Ukpabio's Liberty Films, has not been an exception. Renowned for his handling of action movies, Benson has not escaped the hammer of the Board:

The recent one and the most painful was *Accidental Discharge*. It was a very mild something about us. It was a film on a film director. It was because I mentioned the Censors Board that that film was seized ... But no matter how strong the DGN is, the Censors Board does not respect anybody being a government body (Benson,

personal communication, July 24, 2004).

Paradoxically, Chico Ejiro, the master tactician in directing, who had institutionalised quickies (the *kpa kpa kpa* directors) in Nollywood, had also been a victim. The younger Ejiro is known for completing his shoots in less than five days, so much so that he is in hot demand by EPs, who want to save money from endless days of equipment hire, hotel accommodation, transport, welfare, and other production costs. He was also of the view that the Board was not contributing positively to the development of the industry:

Censors Board is not helping matters. In a movie, if you say: "Are you mad?" or "I love you so much, honey. Please, kiss me," they will tell you to go and remove or clean it off. If I am shooting a movie on a drug addict, the person would not speak certain words; or do a film about a prostitute from Italy, she cannot wear mini skirt, etc. At the end, they reduce your creative ability and interpretation (Ejiro, personal communication, July 24, 2004).

Incidentally, female practitioners were also not impressed with the approach of Odeh in the handling of the business of film censorship. For example, Rita Dominic, a Theatre Arts graduate from the University of Port Harcourt, who specialised in Acting, opines that creativity was being sacrificed on the censor's table every day:

Creativity is being stifled and we are being hindered a great deal; you can't flow freely because you are not allowed to use certain words because of the Censors Board... they are really killing creativity ... You can't even call someone a prostitute and it is doing a lot of harm to the industry (Dominic, personal communication, Jan. 18, 2006).

Ejike Asiegbu, the President of the Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN), was also not impressed with the intervention of the Censors Board. There is no doubt that Asiegbu has come a long way in the industry. Put in a popular parlance in the Nigerian entertainment industry, "he has paid his dues." He started as an

actor and facilitated the rise of the Artistic Director, when he realised that film directors glossed over the artistic interpretation of roles, leaving it at the discretion of individual actors and actresses. Asiegbu is also known for being blunt in expressing his feelings on issues, regardless of whose ox was gored. He was his vintage self in expressing his disappointment with the approach of the Odeh-led Board:

For me, we do not have Censors Board. What we have are people appointed by the government for their selfish gain ... Their job is to classify films. They complain that we should not project or reflect cultures that are not our own ... Americans use their flag in every film. Drama is the mirror of society, whether good or bad. They said that comedy and love are good but when you try to show it live (love), they complain (Asiegbu, personal communication, July 3, 2005).

There are also veteran artists like Richard Mofe-Damijo, who felt that the Board was not acting according to the dictates of the enabling laws. Somehow, due to his added legal training, Mofe-Damijo sounded legalistic in his denunciation of the approach of the Board:

The Censors Board cannot dictate to me how to frame the tone of my production. The visual aspect and tone have grading criteria, so these can be checked for the sake of the public. I do not think the enabling acts/laws grant them the authority to tamper with my artistic work. They do not understand their framework of duty. The Nigerian Nollywood is filled up with uninformed people that are not ready to defend themselves (Mofe-Damijo, personal communication, July 23, 2004).

It is understandable then that there had been strident calls for the Censors Board to be changed to a Classification Board because many film industries around the world have gone through this process. In spite of all of these, the Censors Board still believed that it had been discharging its duties creditably, ensuring that stakeholders displayed high sense of social responsibility through their works. This explains their intervention to bring some level of “sanity” into the industry.

According to James (2001), a major problem militating against Nollywood was lack of production values/codes emanating from practitioners and operators in the industry, which had necessitated official regulatory agencies such as National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC), National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), or the Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON) to intervene. Little wonder then that James, Odeh's predecessor, justified the intervention process of the establishment:

Through its film classification criteria, the introduction of production guidelines, various rules and regulations, the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) management has endeavoured to assist the Nigerian film industry become better disciplined more professionally conscious, more industrially-oriented, better organised so as to reap maximum benefits from its collective efforts (James, 2001, pp. 254-255).

James further observed that having started under a *laissez-faire* atmosphere several years back, it had proved difficult for the industry to subject itself overnight to the idea of a regulated, controlled and closely monitored enterprise. This is understandable because human beings would always resist change at every point in time. The industry, as noted earlier, was started by Igbo traders who did not understand its artistic, technical, and economic implications. They were approaching the business on trial-and-error basis. The consolation for stakeholders was that the change of leadership which saw Mbah taking charge has given them room to receive a listening ear. While Mbah believes that his predecessor had tried during her tenure to create the basic structures, he recognises the need for improvement in information dissemination on-line. According to Ukoyen, Mbah notes on the issue of classification or censorship, thus:

Where you find the name otherwise, there is still an element of censorship and there is adherence to the law and to the socio-cultural values of that particular country. We still have to remember that we live in a country that is still forming, still growing and we have sentiments

and people not understanding one another. It is crucial at some point, within government, to understand that we have to step in from time to time to moderate what I consider to be our creative juices within the Board itself ... We are going to lean more on providing consumers with choice. We are also going to emphasise our monitoring and our enforcement to ensure that if we classify this movie within certain category, it is not available to people that it is not meant for (Ukoyen, 2005, p.3).

The new direction Mbah has charted was the one where censorship would be carried out with the involvement of all stakeholders. As he rightly pointed out, the stakeholders were not just people in the industry, but encompassed other interests like National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), religious bodies, and other interest groups (Husseini, 2005, pp. 2-3).

1.7 The Marketing Approach in Nollywood

In a firm, when you generate revenue for the financial personnel to manage and those on the production line to use in creating products and services, you are involved in marketing. There is no arguing the fact that the survival of any business organisation is dependent on how the target consumers patronise its goods and services. The extent to which this could be realised is dependent on the marketing approach of that establishment. According to McCall, Nollywood seems to be “one of the only bright spots in the country’s gloomy economy” (“Nollywood Confidential,” p.100). He goes on to note that while Africa’s celluloid cinema depended largely on foreign funding, schooling, and inspiration, Nollywood is profitable and self-sufficient, becoming one of the fastest growing sectors of the national economy. He states that there was excitement about the potentials of the industry:

In a strikingly entrepreneurial country where economic opportunities are practically nonexistent, the video industry has laid the groundwork for what might be called the Nigerian Dream – a genuine opportunity for legitimate financial success and even celebrity, open to

just about anyone with talent and imagination (p.102).

There is no arguing the fact that the contemporary Nigerian film industry has come this far due to the Idumota (Lagos) and Upper Iweka Road (Onitsha) electronic and spare parts dealers. Incidentally, their marketing approach, over the years, has been conditioned by the “petty trader” orientation. This is more so because of the fact that, until recently, most of them were hardly educated. All that one needed for apprenticeship under an established trader (who may be a close relation, a townsman, or a distant relation from a neighbouring village), was education up to primary six or at best secondary school. However, Bob Ejike does not share this view, as he states categorically that,

The so-called ‘electronic trader’ is not a fool, but a highly experienced international businessman, who is in most cases educated to secondary school or university level, but found himself constrained to trading as an alternative to joining the long unemployment line. I know what I am talking because I owned shops at Idumota and Balogun and my colleagues there were rugged and highly astute Ibo traders who do not know chemistry or biology, but are masters of the essential knowledge of economic survival, gifted with legendary mercantile acumen (Ejike, 2005b, p. 2).

The unfortunate thing is that while artists get pittance in the name of artist fees, the marketers smile to the banks after every production. It was a welcome relief, therefore, when stakeholders adopted the guilds system and forced a 3-months recess on the industry in early 2002. This was an attempt to check the excesses of the marketers, thus bringing sanity to the industry. Though media watchers were sceptical of the gains of this action, an outcome of this exercise was an alternative market for the industry – the formation of the Film Cooperatives of Nigeria (FCON). The cooperative society established a video film market at Babs Animashaun Street, Surulere, Lagos, which was conceptualised to offer an alternative outlet for prospective producers. Suffice to state that the market is currently more of a ghost town compared to the bustling business atmosphere of

Idumota (Lagos), Upper Iweka (Onitsha) and Pound Road (Aba). The marketers have metamorphosed to a cartel so much so that they operate like a market union, ready to check the rising profile of other stakeholders. This is the case in the banning of eleven actors/actresses and a director in October 2004 (Dede, personal communication, July 21, 2007; Dominic, personal communication, Jan. 18, 2006; Ejiro, personal communication, Nov. 9, 2005).

The concern here is that the above action presupposes a lack of an established star system in the industry basically due to the marketing approach. Ideally, the EPs are those who ought to manage the image of the stars. There are currently no conscious efforts to create a strong star system and sustain it, with a lifestyle that befits that status. This is more so because the film industry has become a major money spinner, and banning those who rake in the money is more or less an act of contradiction. It is like cutting down a money tree because you are spending much money to keep it yielding more money. The marketers dictate the pace of the industry in Nigeria; they provide the funds for the producers (who are the professionals) to produce the films. When an independent producer comes out with a film, he designs the jacket, and approaches a marketer to help market the film; he will count himself lucky if a marketer agrees, and offers what he would pay per jacket. Incidentally, the marketer's readiness to market a film would depend on the number of films he had to market at that point in time. To avoid a glut, the marketers have, over the years, come out with the frequency of film releases: the number bi-weekly or weekly. This is usually accompanied with aggressive publicity through various channels, including posters, billboards, radio and television. The unfortunate thing, however, is that the shelf life of a Nigerian film is just about four weeks. Immediately a film is released into the market, the EP starts working on the next job. It is not surprising that once a film sells up to 100,000 copies, the EP feels on top of the world. Thus, EPs are constantly in search of avenues of saving production costs – from the use of actors, directors, costumiers, locations, hotels, and so on.

Francis Onwochei (2005) captures the Nollywood

production and marketing model from a practical experience. According to him, the model is straightforward. A producer acquires funding to shoot a film. Sometimes, the producer could double as the script writer and director. After production, he hands over the master tape to a marketer, who mass-produces the master for distribution. The producer would have printed posters and jackets for the video cassettes (and video compact discs). The jackets are handed over to the marketer, and a tab is kept on the sale of the film, as the marketer may demand for more film jackets from the producer. At the end of about four weeks, both parties (producer and marketer) sit down to settle account of the sales. In some instances, the producer could demand for payment upfront which sum is arrived at from the estimated sales. The producer would probably start another film project with the proceeds, while still expecting additional balance of payment from the previous film. Except for the extremely successful ones, the actors themselves are usually supportive, as they sometimes work for the producers on credit bases. Unlike many other filmmaking nations, predominantly the Nigerian model skips exhibition, pre-sale of TV rights, and pay-per-view channels. These opportunities are usually explored after the video releases. More than 95% of the films go directly to the video format.

On the international scene, Tony Abulu's Film Association of Nigeria (FAN), USA has contributed immensely towards drawing global attention to the contemporary Nigerian film industry. Having studied the various channels of distribution used by the marketers – Idumota, Onitsha, petrol stations, broadcast stations, and video clubs – FAN, USA opened avenues for international distribution in USA, Canada, and Europe. This was from the realisation that Nigerian films were being dubbed and sold by some individuals, even on the Internet:

The initial trend was that continental Africans would purchase single copies of Nigerian film products in Nigeria and around Africa and illegally ship and mass-produce these titles for sale ... This development created a huge continental African fan base with a population of approximately 1.5 million Africans residing in North

America and Europe, but unfortunately, no income came to the Nigerian filmmakers, and by extension, no foreign exchange was realised by Nigeria (Abulu, 2005, p. 21).

According to Abulu, the strategy of FAN, USA, was to consult with stakeholders to get their mandate to safeguard the industry abroad. The next step was to organise a guided USA tour of Nollywood stars, holding press conferences, facilitating the establishment of bilateral agreements on the eradication of copyright infringement of Nigerian entertainment products, establishment of over 250 distribution channels in USA and Canada, and developing frameworks for Nollywood presence in five regional film festivals in New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Washington DC, and London, for global theatrical exposure of Nigerian films. FAN, USA also negotiated with Afro World Media, an American Cable TV company, to distribute Nigerian films of quality African cultural content. This was in addition to talks with SONY Corporation to make available to Nigerian filmmakers quality High Definition (HD) cameras at discounted rates to enable producers meet minimum global broadcast standards.

The above development points towards a new direction in the marketing and distribution of Nigerian films. Abulu is thus of the opinion that if properly harnessed, Nollywood has the potential of generating huge foreign exchange for the country to the tune of over \$50 million annually from the United States alone. This may appear hyperbolic but the fact remains that if standards are raised and government recognises the potentials of the industry, the private sector would move in and there would be well structured growth.

1.8 Piracy in Nollywood

If Nollywood has a recurrent scourge, which has defied solution, it is piracy. As it were, producers have since resigned to fate, being content with the modest gains they make from the industry. The thinking is that since the industry is more of a jungle or a fishing lake, the best one could do was to be content with whatever one could grab. The result, therefore, has been an obtrusive malaise that has persisted over the years.

Stakeholders believe that the problem could be ameliorated if there are conscious and sustained efforts at combating the problem.

However, the infringement of intellectual property would be viewed from two perspectives: plagiarism and piracy. In the first place, plagiarism, which is prevalent in academics, involves lifting a person's idea or work and presenting it as one's original idea. In this case, the researcher fails to acknowledge the source from which the idea was got, thus, committing intellectual theft. Piracy, on the other hand, entails stealing someone's idea or work and reproducing it in that form or in an adapted form for commercial gains. This is seen in the way script writers simply pick Hollywood story lines, recast, and give such stories Nigerian perspectives. Furthermore, some businessmen and video club owners dub fast-selling film productions and sell or rent them to viewers at very low prices. In all of these, the proceeds from such criminal acts do not get to the copyright owners. This is the hallmark of piracy, a phenomenon which impoverishes the creators of original works of art and has continued to plague the entertainment business globally. It can be surmised then that piracy of intellectual property has certain implications: the consumers may not get to see the original creations; the creators of the original works do not get the proceeds from such works; it breeds corruption as the perpetrators deliberately subvert justice; and it destroys the industry considerably.

There is no gainsaying the fact that there have been some deliberate efforts at fighting piracy in Nigeria. These have been through the Nigerian Copyright Commission (the government organ responsible for protecting the intellectual property of creative artists), and stakeholders like Peace Anyiam-Osigwe, Tony Abulu, Madu Chikwuendu, Don-Pedro Obaseki, and Opa Williams, among others. As it were, the need to protect the intellectual and creative resources of Nigerians had necessitated legislative processes, prior to the rise and development of the contemporary Nigerian film industry. *Decree No. 61* of 1970 was found to be inadequate and due to strident calls, the *Nigerian Copyright Decree No. 47* of 1988 was signed into law on December 19, 1988, by President Ibrahim Babangida. As Tony Momoh,

the Honourable Minister of Information and Culture then noted in the **Foreword** to the *Decree*, a major hindrance to copyright control is that, as an immaterial property, it is easily open to abuse especially when it is made available to the public. This is in addition to the fact that there has been the problem of ignorance of the law and lack of public awareness (*Decree 47*, 1988, p. 3). For example, Section 1(1) of *Decree No. 47* stipulates that literary, musical and artistic works, as well as cinematograph films, sound recordings and broadcasts are eligible for copyright. This is as far as sufficient effort had been expended to give them original character, and such works have been *fixed in a definite medium of expression* (*Copyright Decree*, 1988, p. 7). Unfortunately, the *Decree* seems to encourage rather than discourage piracy, because the penalties for acts of infringement are very mild. Section 15(3) even gives benefit of doubt for offenders in the sense that an offender could walk out of court, free, to plot the next strategy for pirating other works:

Where, in an action for infringement of copyright, it is proved or admitted that an infringement was committed but that at the time of the infringement the defendant was not aware and had no reasonable grounds for suspecting that copyright subsisted in the work to which the action relates, the plaintiff shall not be entitled under this section to any damages against the defendant in respect of the infringement, but shall be entitled to an account of profits in respect of the infringement (*Copyright Decree*, 1988, p.15).

Furthermore, where offenders are liable, the penalty for contravention is as low as one hundred naira only for each of a pirated work or imprisonment of six months or both. In other words, a pirate could mass produce a work, and if he is caught, pays the above amount for the quantity discovered in the warehouse, not the number he had produced before he was caught. There is even no guarantee that the pirate might spend one day behind bars, considering the Nigerian legal system. The position of Adebambo Adewopo, Director-General of the Nigerian Copyright Commission, was that from the judicial

angle, once a person is found liable, he becomes an ex-convict, even if he pays the fine and does not get a prison term. According to the provisions of section 18 of the *Decree*, the stiffest penalty happens to be a criminal liability of one thousand naira only for every copy of the pirated work, and an imprisonment term of five (5) years, or both (*Copyright Decree*, 1988, pp.16-17).

It is worth noting here that the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC), the parastatal vested with the responsibility of protecting the intellectual property of Nigerians through the administration of copyright matters has made quite an impact in the last few years. From the tenure of Moses Ekpo, Eyinnaya Nwauche, and Adebambo Adewopo, as Director-General, NCC has, over the years, created awareness on copyright issues, and moved a step further by implementing the provisions of the decree. For instance, in early 2005, Adewopo put in place the Strategic Action Against Piracy (STRAP), a programme designed to fight various acts of piracy. Sadly, all of the efforts met with various hurdles because of executive interference or, simply put, *the Nigerian factor*. A few instances could be cited here to show that the Commission has been facing an uphill task, and that stakeholders have lost confidence in the ability of the Commission to sanitise the system.

In the first place, the resignation of Nwauche in 2004, gave way for Mrs. Lauretta Njoku to act as the Director-General. She eventually led a raid on the premises of a firm in Lagos, believed to be pirating video films. As it was the practice, regular policemen accompanied the officials on the exercise for security reasons. In the course of the raid, the police officer in charge got a phone call and his disposition changed. He then said that the door to a particular office should not be forced open. When Njoku insisted on breaking the door open, the officer ordered his men to withdraw from the scene, leaving the NCC operational staff unprotected, and suddenly ending an otherwise fruitful exercise. The thinking was that, apparently, the police officer got *orders from above*.

In the second instance, Opa Williams was aggrieved because he found that his popular stand-up comedy show, *Night of a Thousand Laughs*, was being pirated. He arrested a perpetrator

but to his utter dismay, he met the culprit leaving the police station where the case was reported, a free man, in just a couple of minutes, as he (Williams) was going to the station to follow up on the arrest. The man greeted him and advised him to mind his business (producing *Night of a Thousand Laughs*), while he minds his own business (pirating artistic works).

A third case in point was under the watchful eyes of Adewopo, when in actualising his STRAP project, there was a raid on a business premises in Ajah – Lagos, believed to be pirating artistic works. The Divisional Police Officer in charge of the area was said to have driven to the place in a black jeep and called the police officer who was in charge of the security back-up for the NCC team. The DPO told him that he (the police officer) was *on his own*; he made a call on his mobile phone and then drove off. The police officer in charge of the operation became jittery; he then called his men and they withdrew from the premises immediately. Being exposed without the necessary police protection, the team had to abort the raid. It was widely speculated that the said business premises belonged to the son of a top government functionary. Apparently, the DPO also received orders from above and acted fast to stop the Commission from doing more damage (BoB-TV “Copyright Forum,” 2006).

While Adewopo was of the opinion that the Commission was making some progress, filmmakers and other rights’ owners believed that there was little anyone could do to ameliorate the situation. They cited instances where copyright infringements were reported and the Commission would give excuses that there were no vehicles, no personnel, or no money to pursue such cases. It was even surprising that when Adewopo was suspended in mid-2005, at a time media watchers thought he was doing a commendable job, there were contrasting views on the merits or demerits of the suspension. More worrisome was the movement of the Commission to the Federal Ministry of Justice, which now makes the business of fighting piracy an inter-ministerial affair. Time will tell as to the merits or demerits of this policy decision.

1.9 Summary

In this part, the development of the cinema industry in Nigeria was examined, noting that various factors contributed towards its collapse at a time when it was just trying to gain a foothold in the socioeconomic life of the country. Also examined was the historical development of TV drama, which is a precursor to the video film medium in Nigeria. The study of the production approach, censorship, the marketing system, and the problem of piracy in the film industry points to one fact: Nollywood has come a long way. In the final analysis, the position of John Ellis is instructive:

... technology alone does not create the use to which it is put: technology is implemented (or, as with most inventions, never implemented) according to the prevailing patterns of use into which it can be fitted, and according to the emerging forms of social organisation with which it can align itself (Ellis, 1992, pp. 11-12).

There is no gainsaying the fact that with the realities on ground, it is high time stakeholders took a critical look at the operational dynamics of the industry with a view to making it a high revenue earner for the country, comparable only to the oil and gas industry.



Living in Bondage 1



Living in Bondage 2



Kenneth Okonkwo - Andy in *Living in Bondage*



Zeb Ejiro -
Nollywood Director



Emeka Mba, D.G, NFVCB



Madu Chikwendu -
Nollywood Producer



Peace Anyiam-Osigwe -
Initiator of AMA Award



Ayakoroma and RMD



Bimbo Manuel and Nadia Buari



Zack Orji, Paul Obazele & Fidelis Duker



Ola Balogun -
Film Director



Mahmood Ali-Balogun -
Film Director



Sadiq Daba -
Bitrus in *Cockcrow at Dawn*



Barbara Soky -
Tinú in *Mirror in the Sun*



Ngozi Ezeonu -
Nollywood Actress



Bimbo Manuel -
Nollywood Actor



Dakore Egbuson -
Nollywood Actress



Amina Film



Amaka Igwe -
Nollywood Producer



Ibinabo Fiberesima -
Nollywood Actress

Part 2



Studies in Genres in Nollywood

2.1 Introduction

This part attempts a critical study of the concept of genre and its application in the development of the contemporary Nigerian film industry over the years. This is followed by identifying and analysing some basic trends, which have had determinate effect on the emergent film industry, Nollywood, making it to receive global attention. The thrust is an exploration of how the taste of the Nigerian audiences has helped to create and sustain particular kinds of stories and production practices within the industry. It is all aimed at charting a trend in the application of particular genres and the generic development in an industry that is privately driven.

In identifying some basic trends and analysing theoretical frameworks for the practical experiments that have been going on in Nollywood, the conclusion is that the industry is a high revenue earner, which could compete favourably with crude oil, once practitioners pay attention to details and professionalism (Aderinokun, 2004; Balogun, 2007; Mohammed, 2002, pp. 57-58; Ogunsuyi, 2006; Okezie, 2005). There are even indications that just as the Yoruba travelling theatres have made impact in the industry, there is a boom in

film productions in Kano State, to the extent that practitioners refer to the emergent phenomenon as Kannywood (Ali, 2004). Consequently, there is the urgent need for the organised private sector (OPS) and government to be proactive in policy decisions concerning the industry, to put it in an enviable position.

2.2 Understanding Genres

In the practice of film criticism, when analysing a film as belonging to a particular genre, one must be able, in the first place, to describe the individual film; and in the second place, one must be able to explain the principles on which it can meaningfully be associated with other films of that genre. Thus, genre study has been described as *a formal way of examining the system of conventions whereby genres establish patterns of repetition*. Nonetheless, a critical study shows that it goes beyond that because genres are not closed – they are partly open systems, which need to stay the same in order to survive. Also, genres need to retain the possibility of change and innovation. This underpins the description of genres as, *complex sites of cultural repetition and cultural difference, and that one must understand patterns of fixity and patterns of change in order to understand genres* (“Genres,” pp. 1, 4).

This definition seems to be reiterated in the position of Stephen Neale when he states that genres are “patterns/forms, styles/structures, which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the filmmaker, and their reading by an audience” (Neale, 1999, p. 7). To Daniel Chandler, the term, genre, is “widely used in rhetoric, literary theory, media theory, and more recently linguistics, to refer to a distinctive type of text” (Chandler, 1997, p. 1). Furthermore, Robert Allen (1989) notes that,

For most of its 2000 years, genre study has been primarily numerological and typological in function. That is to say it has taken as its principal task the division of the world of literature into types and the naming of those types (as cited in Chandler, 1997, p.1).

It had been noted in the **Introduction** that genres are recognisable groups, which are bound by certain characteristics,

whether in the literary or film medium. This is to the extent that such works would be easily appreciated and understood by an audience because of the classification. However, Chandler sees this concept of genre as being conventional, based on the argument that genres are not definitive. He expatiates:

It is difficult to make clear cut distinctions between one genre and another: genres overlap, and there are 'mixed genres' (such as comedy-thrillers). Specific genres tend to be easy to recognise intuitively but difficult (if not impossible) to define. Particular features which are characteristic of a genre are not normally unique to it; it is their relative prominence, combination and functions which are distinctive (Chandler, 1997, p. 3).

Put in other words, a work that had been classified under one genre by one theorist could be classified by another analyst in a different study as belonging to another genre. This explains why Chandler states that,

One theorist's genre may be another's sub-genre or even super-genre (and indeed what is technique, style, mode, formula or thematic grouping to one may be treated as a genre by another) (Chandler, 1997, p. 2).

It is in the light of the above that Bordwell (1989) offers an inventory of categories used in film criticism, many of which have been accorded the status of genres by various analysts:

Grouping by period or country (American films of the 1930s), by director or star or producer or writer or studio, by technical process (Cinemascope films), by cycle (the 'fallen women' films), by series (the 007 movies), by style (German Expressionism), by structure (narrative), by ideology (Reaganite cinema), by venue ('drive-in movies'), by purpose (home movies), by audience ('teenpix'), by subject or theme (family film, paranoid-politics movies) (as cited in Chandler, 1997, p. 2).

Chandler posits that how a genre is defined depends on one's purpose, and that practitioners and the general public make use of their own genre labels quite apart from those of film theorists. He identifies three basic approaches film theorists have

adopted in the description of genres, namely, definitional, family resemblance, and prototypicality. First, the definitional approach attempts to define genres in terms of necessary and sufficient textual properties in works. As stated earlier, certain features which are characteristic of a particular genre are not unique to it. Second, the family resemblance approach entails the theorist or critic identifying and/or illustrating a body of similarities between films in a given genre. The third draws from a psycholinguistic concept that some works are more typical members of a genre than others, probably because of the traits inherent in them. Chandler is thus of the view that if one is studying the way in which genre frames audiences' interpretation of a film, then it would be more appropriate to focus on how audiences identify genres rather than on theoretical distinctions (Chandler, 1997, p. 4). Taking this position invariably means one subscribes to the fact that genres are dynamic in the sense that they change, modulate and redefine themselves continually.

Perhaps the above could be elucidated with an analogy from the setting of a typical supermarket. Basically, goods are not just packed and dumped on shelves anyhow in a shopping mall or complex. Items are usually stocked according to their brands and needs in the family or the office. This explains why household utensils are seen in one section; toiletries in another; beverages in yet another area; gift items in the other, and so on. This helps prospective clients to quickly identify the various items they need and make their choices. If it is a video mart, the films would be stocked according to musicals, gospels, action films, sci-fi, drama, comedies, epics or historical, and so forth. This will also help the video club members or customers to select films that would best satisfy their viewing needs.

According to Turner (1988), genres emerge as products of a three-way negotiation between audiences, filmmakers and film producers; and the primary object of a genre in the filmic experience is to create recognition in the minds of the audience who watch a production in the context of other films (Turner, 1988, p. 38). This underpins the position that, basically, the master image for genre criticism is the triangle composed of artist-film-audience. This is what Ekwuazi refers to as, a *triadic*

relationship, in the film viewing experience.

Part of the total meaning of any film derives significantly from the viewing circumstances, from the communicative interaction among the audience, a triadic relationship involving each member of the audience with the others, and, of course, with the screen (Ekwuazi, 1987, p. 21).

The position of Neale is coterminous with the above as he observes that in film theory, there seems to have arisen what Jim Kitses referred to as *aesthetic convention*, which is an area of agreement between the audience and the artist. This explains the fact that through the years, the conventions of genre have been known and recognised by the audience, and such recognition is in itself a pleasure in the film viewing experience. Neale expatiates, quoting Kitses in *Horizon West* (1969, p. 26), as stating that,

the western is not just the men who worked within it. Rather than an empty vessel breathed into by the filmmaker, the genre is a vital structure through which flow a myriad of themes and concepts. As such the form can provide a director with a range of possible connections and the space in which to experiment, to shape and refine the kind of effects and meanings he is working towards (as cited in Neale, 1980, p. 8).

Neale further amplifies the position as follows:

genres institutionalise, guarantee coherence by institutionalising conventions, i.e. sets of expectations with respect to narrative process and narrative closure which may be subject to variation, but are never exceeded or broken. The existence of genres means that the spectator, precisely, will always know that everything will be 'made right in the end', that everything will cohere, that any threat or any danger in the narrative process itself will always be contained (Neale, 1980, p. 28).

Understanding genres is very important in film studies because of the unique processes which go into that industry, that is, cinematography, sound-reproduction, the mass circulation of multiple copies of a film which accelerates the

business of exposing audiences to genres. Also, audiences play a major role in maintaining or extinguishing genres because genre membership possesses a communal identity, giving the audience the chance to readily identify that product. People like to know what type of film they are going to see because they find a genre film more accessible than a one-off masterpiece. When an audience recognises a genre, it sees broad social allegories in which society plays out its problems in imaginary forms. Genres can then be seen as re-staging and re-fashioning cultural myths and rituals that are taken up by the cinema to be given new forms of expression and transmission.

The point being emphasised here is that genre, as a classificatory form, makes films comprehensible and more familiar to the audience. Thus, in any viewing experience, the understanding of given genres depends on the audiences' competence and field of experience with respect to the skills they have developed in understanding films and the body of similar experiences they could draw upon. This explains why an illiterate audience would understand a film, which is in English language or typical Nigerian audiences viewing Indian or Chinese films would understand the narratives though such productions are subtitled in English. It is consequent upon this phenomenon that Kauffman (1973) states that, through the ages, two factors have formed the taste of people in any art:

knowledge of that art and knowledge of life ... but function of taste seems to be altering ... and function of taste seems increasingly to be the selection and appraisal of the works that are most valuable – most necessary – to the individuals' existence (emphasis in original) (as cited in Murray, 1973, p.170).

Since genres are products of at least three consummate forces: the industry and its production practices, the text in its contribution to the genre as a whole, and the audience and their expectations and competencies, they depend on the expressiveness or ingenuity of the writer/producer. In explicating this, Turner (1988) states that,

a genre is one of the determinants of the audience's choice of a film, not only in terms of whether or not they possess the competencies to appreciate that genre, but in terms of what kind of film it is they want to see and whether the specific example of that general kind of film (say a comedy) suits their taste (as cited in Yeseibo, 2004, p. 40).

One major criticism of Nigerian films by the average audience is that you can always foreshadow or predict the end of a film from the beginning. It could be argued that this may be from the layman's point of view; but the fact remains that the application of genres in Nollywood needs serious critical attention. Somehow, the position of Chandler constitutes a basic model underlying contemporary media theory, which is,

a triangular relationship between the text, its producers and its interpreters ... genres first and foremost provide frameworks within which texts are produced and interpreted. Semiotically, a genre can be seen as a shared code between the producers and interpreters of texts included within it (Chandler, 1997, p. 8).

From the foregoing, one can comfortably deduce that in any film producing country, popular tastes on the part of the audience dictate the trend in the development of genres. There seems to be a tacit agreement between filmmakers and film audiences, and the best way of charting trends in genres is to recognise how audiences and filmmakers at different historical periods and places have intuitively distinguished one type of movie from another. This is not to ignore the fact that there are perceptions that genres have to be examined from a generic perspective at all times without due consideration to the prevalent production context. Neale cites Tom Ryall as stating that,

one of the major impulses behind genre criticism lies in the common sense assumption that commercial films are produced according to generic formulae, that film tradition and the history of cinema play an important role in determining the actual specificity of any single American picture ... Hollywood films were discussed in

terms of their director's personal vision, world view, individual style, and so on (Neale, 1980, p. 9).

Nonetheless, as Neale rightly argues, discussions on personal vision, world-view and individual style would not be appropriate within the field of popular culture because the production contexts pertaining to film have certain constraints. These include genre conventions and certain forms of dramatic narratives, which act to mediate between the artist's self and the audience he/she addresses. The position he espouses is that such constraints exist only because of the specific economic conditions of production, distribution and exhibition within the commercial cinema and the size of the audience involved which, unlike the stage, is heterogeneous. There is pressure on filmmakers to communicate effectively through the generic convention, maximise profits, and also repeat the formulae marking previous financial successes (Neale, 1980, p.10).

In supporting the above position, Noel King (1992) states, in the main, that,

To make a film is to submit oneself to the rules and meanings generated by classic Hollywood cinema and by television documentary for it is these dominant cultural modes which have set standards of visual literacy and readability for us (King, 1992, p. 3).

King thus maintains that this is how emotion habitually is signified, and that in this way, the sequence can be taken to constitute a playful unmasking of traditional modes of representation. This would then become a specific example of a film practice which reminds one of the facts of signification, and which, more generally, is aimed at opening a gap between cinematic techniques and conventions and the meanings which are usually attached to those techniques. It is a film practice which stresses that there is no natural, self-evident unity between the two. It is also a way of showing the rules, rather than showing the meaning usually produced by the rules. According to King, in the filmic experience,

To occupy the position of viewer means that one has been trained, informally and publicly over time, in the

techniques required to decipher narrative, character and mise-en-scene. The point at which a film achieves intelligibility or readability is the point at which those techniques and discourses which simultaneously make possible the text and its reader lock into place (King, 1992, p. 5).

The above is based on the fact that each film refers its viewer to precisely those mechanisms and discursive systems which enable the reading of texts. This issue is brought to the fore if we consider the assertion of Bill Nichols that,

There is a difference between criticising films because they fail to demonstrate the theoretical sophistication of certain analytical methodologies and criticising them because their textual organisation is inadequate to the phenomena they describe (as cited in King, 1992, p. 6).

Tudor (1976) notes that the most telling suggestions as to the importance of conventions is to be found in the gentle parodies of films. In other words, the crucial factors which distinguish a genre are not only characteristics inherent to the films themselves, they also depend on the particular culture within which one is operating. Unless there is world consensus on the subject, there is no basis for assuming that a Western will be conceived in the same way in every culture. Hence, the way in which the genre term is applied can quite conceivably vary from case to case. Tudor puts it aptly thus:

Genre notions – except the special case of arbitrary definition – are not critic's classifications made for special purposes; they are set of cultural conventions. Genre is what we collectively believe it to be (Tudor, 1976, p. 122).

From the way Tudor conceives the term, it could be argued that genre notions entail an exploration of the psychological and sociological interplay between a filmmaker, a film and an audience, rather than in a *priori* concept for the immediate purposes of film criticism. Until there is a clear, if speculative, notion of a cycle of films within a particular culture, it is difficult to see how a critic could conveniently use the term. To use the

term, genre, in relation to a specific filmmaker, is to methodically analyse the way in which a filmmaker utilises a genre for his/her own purposes and this requires that he/she clearly establishes the principal components of his/her conception of genre. An advantage of genres is the understanding that readers already have knowledge and expectations about works within that genre. Writers who work within a genre, according to Gledhill (1985), work in a creative tension with the conventions, attempting a personal inflection of them (as cited in Chandler, 1997, Sec. 2, p.1). The success of such works then depends on audiences accepting them as meeting their taste. If the reverse is the case, it becomes an exercise in futility because it may take some time for such a director to regain the confidence of the audience.

2.3 Genres in Nollywood

Genres, as it has been noted from the above analysis, constitute an integral part of a film movement in a given industry. An examination of genres in Nollywood entails understanding the film movement for the period. According to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (1993), a film movement consists of

- a) Films produced within a particular period and/or nation that share significant traits of style and form;
- b) Filmmakers who operate within a common production structure who share certain assumptions about filmmaking (Bordwell & Thompson, 1993, p. 451).

Since a film movement consists of not only films, but also the activities of specific filmmakers, Bordwell and Thompson observe that there is need to go beyond noting stylistic and formal qualities by sketching relevant factors that impinge on the given film industry. These factors include the state of the film industry, artistic theories held by the filmmakers themselves, pertinent technological features, and elements of the socio-economic context of the period. Such factors necessarily help to explain how a particular movement began, what shaped its development, and what affected its decline (Bordwell & Thompson, 1992, p. 452).

As stated earlier, Kenneth Nnebue of Nek Video Links produced the first commercially successful video film, *Living in Bondage* (Vic Mordi, 1992). This attempt opened the floodgates in the emergent industry as electronic and motor spare part dealers, among others, rushed to produce Igbo language genre films. Thus, the Nigerian audience saw films like *Taboo* (Ogunjiofor, 1993), *Rattlesnake* (Amaka Igwe, 1995), *Rituals* (Amenechi, 1995), and *Blood Money* (Nnebue, 1997), among others, that dwelt on rituals, occult practice, voodoo, witchcraft, and other such vices that served as ingredients for practitioners. Incidentally, the viewing experience of Igbo language films was more like what one experiences in watching Indian, Japanese, or Chinese films. The producers just subtitled them in English; and viewers who did not understand the Igbo language had the added task of reading the subtitles to fully understand the lines. The fact remains that this is an extraneous exercise, which subtracts from the overall viewing experience of such films. In a bid to have wider circulation in the face of the success the Igbo language films enjoyed, Nnebue again pioneered the production of commercial video films in English language, beginning with *Glamour Girls* (Chika Onukwafor, 1996). Other producers saw the wisdom in the new approach and also started producing video films in English language. This provided an impetus and the industry has experienced an unprecedented growth since then.

Perhaps, it should be observed at this point that conscious attempts at producing Nigerian films in line with a dominant genre was intensified with the epic or historical genre. According to Dirks, epic films are, “costume dramas” or “period pictures that often cover large expanse of time set against a vast panoramic backdrop” (Dirks, 2005, p. 6). These films attempt to reconstruct our historical past as well as our myths and legends. The cycle appeared to have made impact with *Battle of Musanga* (Dawodu, 1996), an English language film. Somehow, producers and marketers saw the prospects and delved into our mythic past. Thus, viewers saw, among others films like *Ojadike* (Amenechi, 1997), which was an imitation of Walt Disney Pictures’ *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), *Igodo* (Amenechi

& Obaseki, 1998), *Ijele* (Amata, 1999), *Eye of the Gods* (Amenechi, 1999), and *Egg of Life* (Amenechi, 2003), which we see as the female version of *Igodo*. A detailed examination of this genre is undertaken in **Part Three**.

It is pertinent to note that the epic films were produced with fairly big budgets, in the sense that while earlier films were shot on budgets of less than one million naira, epics gulped well over three million naira on the average. It is understandable then that the mercantilist orientation in the industry did not see such ventures as propitious to business interests. The paramount objective of any trader is maximising profit, and the average Igbo trader, though not schooled in modern business management, is not an exception. In other words, producers in the contemporary Nigerian film industry did not see the wisdom in spending about five million naira to shoot an epic when he could use about one million naira to produce a low budget film (with a manageable cast) and make good profit.

Incidentally, *Glamour Girls* delved into the problem of prostitution, and this brought into focus, the prostitution and ghetto life genre. This genre comprises works which examine the lives of young girls who due to the love for money resort to selling their bodies to make a living. The proclivity of young girls towards indiscriminate and unprotected sex, in defiance of the likely consequences, had reached an alarming proportion in the country. The fact is that commercial sex workers or hospitality girls abound everywhere; they are being shipped abroad (especially to Italy and Spain), sadly, because of their desperate bid to earn hard or foreign currency. This genre, which also projects the ghetto life of certain strata of the society, include films like *Glamour Girls* (Onu, 1995), *Domittila* (Ejiro, 1996; 1997), and *The Prostitute* (Amata & Opechi, 2001).

After the language films and epics, producers also veered into productions that were much more cost effective, but still projected the rich Nigerian culture. This brought to the fore films that could be classified in a genre that deals with traditional beliefs. This includes films like *Blood of the Orphan* (Okafor, 1999), *Ngene* (Obiakunwa, 2000), *Ebube* (Amenechi, 2002), *Over My Dead Body* (Moses, 2002), *The Orphan* (Arase, 2002), and

Bonds of Tradition (Orji, 2004), among others. They are films which portray the norms and mores of traditional African societies; they delve into ancestral belief system, the communal life of the people, land ownership system, marriage, burial traditions, and widowhood practice, among others.

Like epics, most Nigerian films that deal with traditional beliefs feature large casts, expansive sets, and fairly big budgets. Thus, the search for appropriate genres that could be produced at minimal costs continued; the result was the recourse to family situation dramas. These are films that examine peculiar marital and family relationships from the contemporary perspective. They are more or less sitting room dramas, with limited casts, and play mostly on suspense, a major ingredient in the soap opera tradition identified elsewhere (Ayakoroma, 1995a, pp. 126-133). This genre includes films like *Just a Mission* (Chico Ejiro, 1998), *Gold Diggers* (Opeoluwa, 2000), and *Submission* (Onu, 2001), to mention a few.

The Nigerian audience was also treated to yet another genre, in an attempt by producers to satisfy public taste. Basically, this is what can be classified as the love and romance genre. This genre constitutes films which are targeted at the female audience and youths; they centre on love, sex and romance, and feature young ravishing actors and actresses that quickly catch the fancy of the audience. Films like *Romantic Attraction* (Iroegbu, 2002), *Disguise 1 & 2* (Ebere, 2002), *All for Love* (Okpechi, 2002), *Love in Bondage* (Thompson, 2002), *True Love* (Egbon, 2003), *Super Love* (Ezeanyaeche, 2003), and *Still in Love* (Onu, 2004), among others, fall within the love and romance genre. As it were, this genre projected artists like Richard Mofe-Damijo (RMD), Sam Dede, Ramsey Nouah, Jim Iyke, Emeka Ike, Genevieve Nnaji, Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde, Stephanie Okereke, Rita Dominic, Monalisa Chinda, Bimbo Akintola, Stella Damasus, Dakore Egbuson, Chiege Alisigwe, Chioma Chukwuka, and Carol Ekanem, among others.

The popularity of the emergent genres seemed to have emboldened producers as they ventured into other genres, and this informs the attempts at producing crime/gangster films. This genre portrays the failure of the policing system in Nigeria,

which had necessitated law abiding citizens to adopt stringent security measures for self-defence or personal survival. Vigilante groups, security organisations, “Beware of Dogs” signs (even when the dogs in such compounds are mere harmless puppies), very high fences (with barbed wires) around compounds that make the occupants more of prisoners, are all features that show the poor state of the regular policing system in Nigeria. The indiscriminate killing of six innocent law abiding traders, popularly referred to as, the “Apo six,” in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, is one glaring case of the arrant indiscretion of the Nigeria Police.

On the night of Tuesday, June 7, 2005, five Igbo traders and a young female undergraduate were murdered by the police, who attempted to cover up the crime, alleging that the deceased were armed robbers and were killed in a shootout. The police brutality eventually met with mass protests and riots by Igbo traders in Apo Village, who insisted that government should probe the circumstances surrounding the killings. Unfortunately, Constable Anthony Idam, an Igbo policeman who was in the police patrol team, blew the lid open and the police had nowhere to hide. A Judicial Commission of Inquiry under the chairmanship of Justice Olasunbo Goodluck was set up to get the truth and a can of worms was opened (Bakare, 2005, pp. 39-40). Firstly, the Divisional Police Officer of the Garki Police Station, Othman Abdulsalam, who was alleged to have ordered the killings, escaped to avoid being tried (Ganagana, Anosike & Fanawopo, 2005, p. 4). Secondly, Police Constable Idam suddenly died under very suspicious circumstances, and his younger brother, Ogbonna Idam, accused the police of having poisoned him (Idam, 2005, p. 4). Thirdly, the Inspector-General of Police, Sunday Ehindero, apologised publicly on behalf of the police force for the killing (Adebusuyi, Soniyi & Isine, 2005, p. 5). Finally, it was confirmed that Constable Idam died of what pathologists called organophosphate poisoning (Onuora, 2005, pp.1, 4).

The above scenario, to say the least, is stranger than fiction. The reality in Nigeria is that instead of the police being a friend to all, the average Nigerian sees the police as enemies to be

wary of, maybe, next to men of the underworld. Films in the crime/gangsters genre are replete with violence, as criminals operate outside (and in defiance) of the law under one guise or the other. Examples include, *Blind Trust* (Dozie, 1997), *Issakaba* (Imasuen, 2000), and *Broad Daylight* (Benson, 2001). This genre is examined in detail in **Part Four** of this book.

Another emergent film genre which is worth examining is thrillers. These are basically serious dramatic presentations that portray realistic characters, settings, and real life situations; they involve intense character development and interaction. Thrillers are more like television dramas than the Nigerian audience was served with in the era of soap operas. They play on suspense and do not display special effects and other such extraneous narrative techniques. Films that could be classified in this genre include *Emotional Crack* (Imasuen, 2002), *Private Sin* (Imasuen, 2003), *Price of Hatred* (One-Week, 2004), and *Critical Decision* (Imasuen, 2004).

There are also Christian genre feature films that are seen as veritable instruments for evangelism. In the main, Christian films aim at preaching the word of God to win souls, to return backsliding Christians to the church again, and also to increase or strengthen the faith of believers. Unarguably, Mike Bamiloye of Mount Zion Faith Ministries contributed immensely to the production of Christian video films on commercial basis. However, he did not make much impact because the productions were more of video recordings of religious storylines and were not properly packaged. The films were more of family productions – his family or congregation members made up the casts. Incidentally, Helen Ukpabio of Liberty Gospel Ministries would have made the same mistake but for the collaborative effort of Teco Benson who started directing her productions. The breakthrough in this collaboration is the pacesetter, *The Price* (Benson, 1999), starring Richard Mofe-Damijo (RMD) and Eucharia Anunobi. The success of this film was such that every producer/director became born again and took delight in ending film productions with the catch phrase: “To God be the Glory,” before rolling end credits. Apart from *The Price* (Benson, 1999), there are other Christian films like *End Time* (Nnebue,

1999) (which catapulted Clem Ohameze to stardom with the brilliant interpretation of the role of Pastor Weaver), *Christian Marriage* (Onu, 1999), and *Rapture* (Jeta Amata, 2002), among others.

Another generic development identifiable in Nollywood is that which is centred on gender issues. Gender films treat gender-related issues such as circumcision, the place of the girl-child, gender equality, the place of women in society, discrimination against women, women empowerment, and widowhood practice, to mention a few. In the main, these films promote feminist ideologies to a large extent and act as warning to the discerning public that if there are no positive actions to ameliorate such situations, the feminine folks would be the worse for it. Some of these issues are found in *Mortal Inheritance* (Zeb Ejio, 1996), *Scars of Womanhood* (Ebere, 1997), *August Meeting* (Imasuen, 2001), *The Orphan* (Arase, 2002), *Keeping Faith* (Lukas, 2002), and *World Apart* (Chikere, 2004).

One generic convention that has taken the industry like a storm is the comedy genre. Like stage plays, the comedy genre is made up of films, which are light-hearted and are designed to amuse and provoke laughter. This is achieved through exaggerated situations, language, profuse actions, stock characters and relationships. Films like *Akinokwa* (Philips, 1999), *Ukwa* (Onu, 2001), *One Dollar* (Moses, 2002), *Omugwo: Child Visit 1 & 2* (Chikere, 2002), and *Osuofia in London 1 & 2* (Ogoro, 2003) can be categorised under this genre. Like love and Christian genres, this is a popular genre as youths and women savour the comic wits of artists like Nkem Owoh (Osuofia), Sam Loco Efe, Patience Ozokwor (Mama Gee), John Okafor (Mr. Ibu), Victor Osuagwu (Odera), Okey Bakassi, and the dwarf duo of Chinedu Ikedieze (Aki) and Osita Itheme (Pawpaw), among others.

There are also adventure films that exhibit high energy, physical stunts and chases, battles, fights, escapes, and spectacles that take the audiences' breath away. These are the war/action films and they include films like *Escape from Congo* (Chico Ejio, 2000), *Executive Crime* (Benson, 2000), *State of Emergency* (Benson, 2000), *The President Must Not Die* (Zeb Ejio, 2004),

Across the Niger (Ogoro, 2004), *War Front* (Benson, 2004), and *State of Emergency 2* (Thompson, 2005), among others. A major problem associated with most of these war/action films is that they lack technical depth and sophistication in gun battles, military warfare, arms and ammunition. This is in addition to the scanty number of military personnel used in such productions. The bottom line is that most of them could best be described as amateurish, making mockery of military warfare.

The political film genre seems not to have offered much incentive to producers in Nigeria in the sense that any foray into the secret or public lives of the political class could be taken as portraying the political leadership in bad light. Thus, care is taken to treat subjects that would be safe in the eye of the ruling class, which means such films may not be of popular appeal to the audience. It explains why, until recently, films in this genre are very few, and they include, *The Kingmaker* (Fred Amata, 2002), *The Senator* (Benson, 2003), *Masterstroke* (Imasuen, 2004), *His Majesty* (Nnajiude, 2004), and *Queen of Hasso Rock* (Williams, 2005). The nature of this genre is extensively examined in **Part Five**.

Another genre, which is yet to get serious attention from Nigerian producers, is horror films. Film directors have been wary about this genre probably because of the immense technical requirements. According to Dirks, these are films designed “to frighten and to invoke our hidden fears, often in a terrifying, shocking finale, while captivating and entertaining the audience at the same time in a cathartic experience” (Dirks, 2005, p. 6). Attempts in this category include *Valentine Day* (Adogo, 2001), and *Lovers’ Day* (Novia, 2003).

In concluding the study on the generic development in the contemporary Nigerian film industry, it can be posited that there have been no remarkable attempts in the areas of animated and science fiction (sci-fi) films. The probable reasons for film practitioners’ non-incursion into these genres include, among others, the serious technical demands, budget, time needed to plan and produce such genres, the market, and the fact that there is no assurance on the prospects of financial returns on such productions.

2.4 Analysis of Generic Developmental Trends in Nollywood

Having examined the development of genres in Nollywood, it is necessary to delineate some of the identifiable trends. The point to note here is that the trends are by no means definitive.

2.4.1 Promotion of Many Igbo Stars

Since the financial control of the industry is in the hands of Igbo businessmen, it has been easy for the EPs to raise many Igbo film stars. It is not surprising then that a greater number of the selling faces are of Igbo extraction. This explains the stardom of artists like Nkem Owoh, Pete Edochie, Ego Boyo, Ejike Asiegbu, Charles Okafor, Zulu Adigwe, Stephanie Okereke, Genevieve Nnaji, Patience Ozokwor, Zack Orji, Francis Duru, Ashley Nwosu, Anne Njemanze, Ngozi Ezeonu, Gloria Norbert Young (nee Anozie), Ngozi Nwosu, Saint Obi, Steph-Nora Okere, Rita Dominic, Benita Nzeribe, Chiwetalu Agu, Amaechi Muonagor, John Okafor (Ibu), Uche Osotule, Rita Nzelu, Sandra Achums, Eucharika Anunobi, and Rita Edochie. Others include Chinedu Ikedezie (Aki), Osita Iheme (Pawpaw), Emeka Ike, Jim Iyke, Emeka Enyiocha, Clem Ohameze, Chiege Alisigwe, Oby Edozie, Grace Amah, Chioma Chukwuka, Jennifer Eliogu, Emeka Okoro, Obi Okoli, Fabian Adibe, and Nkiru Sylvanus, to mention a few. Also, university professors like Laz Ekwueme and Emeka Nwabueze have, in addition to their academic work, carved a niche for themselves in the industry. However, a critical analysis reveals that a greater number of the above star actors and actresses or selling faces, had no professional training before entering the industry. Today, they are stars in their own rights, enjoying the glamour of Nollywood.

2.4.2 Projection of Trained and Non-Igbo Artists

One interesting thing about the transition from Igbo to English language films is that it provided the enabling atmosphere for various genres to be explored. It also created an avenue for many trained theatre artists and film enthusiasts from other ethnic groups, outside Igbo and Yoruba circles, to enter the industry. This underscores the emergence of stars like Richard

Mofe-Damijo, Sam Dede, Norbert Young, Liz Benson, Hilda Dokubo, Regina Askia, Sam Loco Efe, Columbus Irisoanga, Enebeli Elebuwa, Justus Esiri, Alex Usifo-Omiagbon, Fred Amata, and Kate Henshaw-Nuttal. Others include Obot Etuk, Shan George, Rosemary Ingbi, Lilian Bach, Susan Patrick, Dakore Egbuson, Ini Edo, Carol Ekanem, Rachael Oniga, Peter Bunor, Jake Aernen, Rekiya Attah, Robert Peters, Gentle Jack, Gogo Ombo Gogo, and Pat Attah, among others.

2.4.3 *The Parts or Sequel Syndrome*

Predictably, this disturbing trend is a carry-over from television production. The point had been made that the soap opera tradition thrived on suspense by instalments. Starting with *Living in Bondage*, the parts approach has been seen as an economic success formula. At the beginning, the practice was that once a story sells very well, the next thing a marketer did was to produce a sequel. The trend has since changed as the EPs start from the onset to produce two or three parts at the same time. This only applies to marketers that may be honest, because there are some EPs that would shoot a script and release it in two or three parts, when the artists may have been paid as a one-off production (Dede, personal communication, July 21, 2007; Mofe-Damijo, personal communication, July 23, 2004). Needless to state here that such productions most often lack finesse as the story would be made to drag with long sequences of panoramic shots laced with unnecessary background music.

2.4.4 *Simultaneity or Back-to-Back Productions*

Another phenomenon is the practice of artists getting involved in productions simultaneously or back-to-back. It is a situation whereby some stars would be on two or three sets at the same time, and directors are forced to work out schedules to accommodate such actors. Take, for example, a situation whereby Star **A** would be playing the role of a husband on Set **A** and that of a pastor on Set **B**; and Star **B** could be a young girl on Set **A** and a hardened criminal on Set **B**, respectively. From a professional point of view, it can be argued that there is no way the characterisation would be above board. The result

would be more or less sacrificing quality for quantity because such artists would not give their best (Dominic, personal communication, Jan. 18, 2006). The development may be as a result of the attitude of producers, who are sometimes bent on using certain selling faces in their movies. It could also be inadvertent, as there may be delay in the shooting schedule of a producer thus encroaching on another scheduled production (Mofe-Damijo, personal communication, July 23, 2004). The fact remains that if there are long periods of painstaking planning and the industry does not celebrate the number of productions people churn out, this negative practice would have been ameliorated.

2.4.5 Evolution of an Iconography

The industry has gradually developed an iconography, a set of visual imagery in films – houses, costumes, props, visual movements, and so on, which are identified with the various locations used in films. The iconography or the visual convention of most films is predictable, according to the genre. If one is watching a traditional genre, for example, one sees native doctors, who most often have their shrines under trees! He or she must be adorned in white or red cloth; and usually, a confidante takes the afflicted person to the so-called shrine. If it is an epic or historical genre, what one sees are sack cloths as costumes and faces or bodies of characters adorned with various types of tattoo. For contemporary stories, one sees all types of palatial houses in highbrow areas and flashy cars, always spiced with repetitive aerial pan shots of city landscapes in almost every production. Unfortunately, the bedrooms in these films do not match the lavishly furnished sitting rooms, as it is hotel rooms that are mostly used. Understandably, people would not like producers to use their bedrooms because that would be invading their privacy.

2.4.6. Scriptwriters and Plagiarism

The quality of scripts that are churned out is of great concern to film viewers. It is believed that this has been occasioned by the bandwagon approach by the EPs. Once a marketer records

commercial success with a particular genre or title, all other marketers direct their energies towards producing prototypes which sometimes border on plagiarism. The dilemma of scriptwriters is such that some EPs pick foreign films they like and request them (scriptwriters) to adapt such storylines to Nigerian settings. If Director **A** comes out with a film where a chair is seen flying in the air, another EP would want Director **B** to make a chair and a table fly together in his own film. Furthermore, the fewer the days it takes a director to come out with a production, the more popular he would be. This has given rise to what has come to be called *kpa kpa kpa* (quickies) directors. This, according to Chico Ejiro, is a survival strategy that has been adopted in the industry (Ejiro, personal communication, July 24, 2004).

2.4.7. Stereotyping and Type-casting

The bandwagon approach has led to stereotyping in the area of film titles. One finds titles like *Glamour Girls* (Nnebue, 1995; Nnebue, 1996), *Glamour Boys* (Jeta Amata, 1996), *Osuofia in London* (Ogoro, 2003), *Ibu in London* (Williams, 2003), *Price of Hatred* (One-Week, 2003), *Price of the Wicked* (Chidebe, 2003), *My God* (Okoh, 2003), *My Hero* (Opeoluwa, 2003), *My In-law* and *My Saviour* (Onu, 2003), among others, in the area of genres. Once there is a breakthrough in any genre, every EP would concentrate on that genre. In line with the star system, there is continued patronage of selling faces until the audience gets tired of such stars. It is Genevieve Nnaji, Stephanie Okereke, Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde, Rita Dominic, Richard Mofe-Damijo, Jim Iyke, Ramsey Noah, or Emeka Ike, among others in love stories; it is Nkem Owoh (Osuofia), Sam Loco Efe, Patience Ozokwor (Mama Gee), John Okafor (Ibu), Victor Osuagwu (Odera), Chinedu Ikedieze (Aki) and Osita Itheme (Pawpaw) in comedies; and it is Pete Edochie, Amaechi Muonagor, Columbus Irisoanga, Emmanuel France, Gogo Ombo Gogo (the last three as native doctors) in epics and historical films. On the other hand, it is Sam Dede (Issakaba), Gentle Jack, Robert Peters, Hanks Anuku, and Segun Arinze (Black Arrow), among others, in action films; while Chiwetelu Agu, Fabian Adibe, Larry

Koldsweat, Pete Eneh, and Roy Denani, among others, are regular faces in films that portray traditional beliefs, and so on.

2.4.8 Women as Sex Symbols

Many Nigerian films portray women as mere sex symbols. In many films, they do not play any significant role in the decision-making process in the family. It can be argued that this has been occasioned by the thinking in traditional African societies that women are there just to procreate and look after the family, in consonance with the dictum that, “the place of the woman is in the kitchen.” In most cases, husbands blame their wives if there are problems with their children; but when such children make the parents proud, the father usually takes all the credit.

2.4.9 Guilds System

Another development in the industry has been the formation of professional guilds, as a result of agitations at various levels. The industry witnessed a serious glut by year 2000 due to the fact that producers churned out films in very large numbers. Incidentally, this was at a time artists were owed fees by unscrupulous producers, who would rather spend such monies on flashy cars and other perks. It precipitated a situation whereby the EPs moved in to handle productions personally to safeguard their investments. The result was that the industry eventually called for a recess from January to March 2002 to sanitise the system. Though some key players in the industry opine that the recess did not achieve anything, it is on record that many professional guilds – Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN), Directors Guild of Nigeria (DGN), Screen Writers Guild of Nigeria (SWG N), Nigerian Society of Cinematographers (NSC), Association of Movie Producers (AMP), Nigerian Society of Editors (NSE), Association of Movie Marketers (AMM), and Creative Designers Association of Nigeria (CDAN) – have since become functional.

2.4.10 Remuneration of Artists

As the tempo of productions increased, artist fees also appreciated. While many **A**-list artists received just about five thousand naira (₦5,000) as at 1992 (and they saw it as good money then, compared to just about five hundred naira (₦500) they were getting from appearances in television soap operas), artist fees rose up to between one million naira (₦1m) and two million naira (₦2m) for each appearance for such **A**-list artists. This could be attributed to the economic forces of demand and supply. Some artists were in high demand by marketers who even went to the extent of paying artist fees upfront into the bank accounts of such perceived stars or selling faces, in order to commit them. The implication was that if another marketer wanted that artist, he had to pay higher than what the other marketer had paid. The phenomenon was more of a bazaar which was rather uncoordinated. Paradoxically, before the marketers knew it, the stars realised that they could indeed dictate their terms and they started demanding higher artist fees and other perquisites. In other words, the marketers created monsters in Nollywood and they had to move against such monsters through the ban of twelve stars, including a director in October 2004 and pegging of artist fees at a maximum of five hundred thousand naira (Dede, personal communication, July 21, 2007).

2.4.11 Rise of Film Directors

The contemporary Nigerian film industry has grown beyond the hegemony of television-trained directors like Chris Obi-Rapu, Chika Onu, Andy Amenechi, Ndubuisi Okoh, Zeb Ejiro, Chico Ejiro, Bolaji Dawodu, Amaka Igwe, Ralph Nwadike, Tade Ogidan, Izu Ojukwu, and Tunji Bamigbisin, among others. Over the years, two other sets of directors have emerged. First, there are theatre trained directors who have entered the industry and started directing films. These include Don Pedro Obaseki, Lancelot Imaseun, Amayo Uzor Phillips, Sam Dede, Emma Oga, the Amata hierarchy: Zack, Fred, Jeta and Ruke Amata, Ejike Asiegbu, Charles Okafor, Dickson Iroegbu, Adim Williams, Charles Inojie, Kabat Esosa Egbon, Charles Awurum, Saviour

Agoro, Ugo Ugbor, John Njamah and Alex Mouth, among others. Second, there are those who acquired practical experience while going through a period of apprenticeship. In this category, we can identify directors like Kalu Anya, Ikechukwu Onyeka, Teco Benson, Tarila Thompson, Afam Okereke, Simi Opeoluwa, Opa Williams, Tchidi Chikere, Ifeanyi Okpoenyi, Zack Orji, Gabriel Moses, Ojiofor Ezeanyaeche (OJ), Sunny McDon, Tony Anih, Aquillah Njamah, Andy Nwakalor, Prince Emeka Ani, Ifeanyi Onyeador, and Sonny Collins, to mention a few. The latter filmmakers started off either as production assistants, directors of photography, location managers, or production managers, before graduating to direct films.

2.4.12 Censorship

This has been a very contentious issue in the industry in the last three years, mainly because of the puritan position of the erstwhile leadership of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB). The emphasis had been the portrayal of sex, violence, spilling blood, nudity, indecent dressing, religious intolerance, obscene language, and presenting government in bad light. Directors like Zeb Ejoro, Amayo Uzor Phillips, Charles Awurum, Teco Benson, Afam Okereke, Chico Ejoro, and a host of others, have had sad stories to tell about their encounters with the Censors Board during the tenure of Odeh. Suffice to state that the industry experienced a moment of respite, with the tenure of Emeka Mbah as the Director-General of the Board.

2.4.13 National and International Market

Nollywood has captured the African film market as well as that of Blacks in the Diaspora. Nigerian films are watched all over the West African coast, in such a way that Nigerian film actors/actresses enjoy the glamour of stardom in many countries. One can say that perhaps apart from soccer, Nollywood has positively projected Nigeria on the international scene. Nollywood icons like Olu Jacobs, Richard Mofe-Damijo, Sam Dede, Ramsey Nouah, Jim Iyke, Genevieve Nnaji, Stephanie Okereke, Rita Dominic, Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde, Ini Edo, Nkem Owoh, Patience Ozokwor, Chinedu Ikedieze, and Osita IHEME, among

others, are very popular outside the shores of the country. For instance, while RMD starred in the Guinness Breweries sponsored *Critical Assignment* (Xenopoulos, 2004) alongside Michael Power, Stephanie Okereke starred in *Snitch* (Homeyer & Barbuzano, 2007), an MNET drama serial.

It will be recalled that in early 2005, there were reports that the Ghanaian authorities had banned the distribution of Nigerian films. According to Okezie (2006), as a way of showing commitment to the development of the film sector, the Federal Government, through the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC), sponsored three filmmakers, Zeb Ejiro, Teco Benson and Afolabi Olusegun (with Afolabi Adesanya, Managing Director of NFC, as the team leader) to Ghana. The purpose of the visit was to ascertain the status of Nigerian films in that country – banned or not. Adesanya stated on his return that the distribution of Nigerian films was only restricted for a few months for their local market to be sanitised. However, the visit which generated interest within the industry, especially among marketers/producers, seemed to have yielded fruits because the President of Ghanaian Marketers Association, Steve Hackman, paid a reciprocal visit to Nigeria and held talks with his counterparts in both Lagos and Onitsha. As it were, what Adesanya owned up amounts to actual banning of Nigerian films in Ghana, a phenomenon that is not new in the history of film. Hollywood suffered the same fate in its early years as Mast states:

In the 1930s, there were quota laws against Hollywood films in Britain to protect the British film industry from the looming domination of the American film industry. Paradoxically, the laws only guaranteed that extremely cheap incompetent “quickies” would be cranked out by British studios to satisfy quotas (Mast, 1981, p. 532).

In the area of marketing, the development is such that there are Nigerian film outlets in America, Great Britain, Central European and Asian countries, and even on the Internet. Visits to London, Cape Town, and Nairobi, for example, showed that Nigerian films were being distributed mostly by Pakistanis, not even Nigerians; and they make brisk business every day. Perhaps if you were looking for a favourite flick which is not on the

shelves in Nigeria, you may find it in London, New York, Cape Town, Nairobi, or on the Internet. Somehow, Nigeria is yet to be adequately covered in the area of marketing and distribution of films. Film markets exist only in Lagos (Idumota), Onitsha (Upper Iweka) and Aba (Pound Road). Paradoxically, Enugu, which is a major “factory” in Nollywood, east of the Niger, has no film market. Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, is also fast becoming a production base, but there is no film market there. The implication is that if there is a strategic marketing approach, films would reach the target audiences easily and this would increase the circulation and reduce the tendency of piracy.

2.4.14 Alternative Film Market

Another outcome of the 2002 recess was the alternative film market at Babs Animasaun Street, Surulere, Lagos initiated by the Film Cooperative of Nigeria (FCON). The realisation was that the Idumota marketers had a stranglehold on film production and distribution, which was not healthy for the growth of the industry. It was such that once a film did not feature artists of their choice, the EPs would not market such films. Where they even agreed to market such films, they offered pittance that may not even cover the production cost. The proponents of the market thus saw the need to find alternative avenues for prospective producers to distribute their productions. Unfortunately, they discovered, too late, that they had underrated the might of the Idumota marketers, as the Surulere market is like a ghost town presently, as opposed to the beehive of activities at Idumota (Lagos), Upper Iweka (Onitsha), and Pound Road (Aba).

2.4.15 Piracy in the Industry

This is a scourge in the industry, and only the marketers can tell how this happens. To Opa Williams, the experience was such that the person he arrested just told him to mind his business, while he minds his own (piracy) business. Unfortunately, copies of films which are in high demand outside the shores of this country are pirated works. Browse the Internet and you will see Nigerian films being advertised; but the sad thing is that the

proceeds never get to the producers in Nigeria.

2.4.16 Lack of Institutional Support

Government has been playing the role of an observer in Nollywood. In the same vein, banks and other financial institutions are cautiously waiting to see how practitioners would put their house in order. There is no gainsaying the fact that the industry has its alluring dimension as it guarantees quick returns which could be re-invested in other productions or sequels. At its inception, prospective artists just got roles as far as they were willing to take a shot at acting. They may not have had the requisite professional training; and artist fees were not assured for such appearances. In some cases, the EPs insist on featuring certain preferred stars or introducing certain new faces, who may probably be their girlfriends or family members. These are situations where directors have no choice as, “he who pays the piper, dictates the tune.” Also, filmmakers have to go through frustrating conditions to get permission to use military hardware, airports, or other public places. This has led to situations where directors just make do with such representations at the expense of realistic approaches. This translates to a case of sacrificing quality on the altar of mediocrity.

2.4.17 Revenue Generation for Broadcast and Advertising Industries

There is no arguing the fact that Nollywood has contributed immensely towards enhancing the revenue base of the broadcast media and advertising organisations. This is in serving as programme formats as well as promotional materials.

2.4.18 Co-Productions

The issue of co-productions is another trend that has impacted positively on the development of Nollywood. This is apparently one of the measures adopted by the marketers to capture the film markets of other African countries. The first attempts were productions featuring Ghanaian actors and actresses, who have eventually become popular in Nigeria. Some of such stars

include Van Vicker, Majid Michael, Jackie Appiah and Nadia Buari. This approach has been extended to Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cameroon. Lancelot Oduwa Imaseun further extended the borders, as he pioneered co-production with Hollywood, thus opening a new window of opportunities for Nigerian film practitioners (Imasuen, personal communication, Jan. 18, 2006; Onyekwere, 2006, p. 44).

2.4.19 Film Awards

The contemporary Nigerian film industry has also witnessed the rise of movie awards. The good thing about these awards is that they bring the industry into global focus. For instance, the Bayelsa State government hosts the Africa Movie Academy Award (AMAA). The first three editions took place on Saturday, April 30, 2005, Saturday, April 29, 2006, and Saturday, March 10, 2007, respectively. The packaging of the event, which was advertised on CNN, Africa Magic, and MNET, as well as the network service of NTA and AIT, the venue of the event (the Gloryland Cultural Centre, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State), the set designs, and the attendance, have been such that AMAA has been adjudged the best thing so far to happen in the history of the Nigerian movie industry. The attention Nollywood has attracted has earned the video format global recognition in international film festivals.

2.5 Summary

In this part, the concept of genre was examined, highlighting the fact that genre cannot be simply described as the classification of films according to certain characteristics; and that its usage is determined, to a large extent, by the purpose of the film. In enhancing the understanding of the application of genres in Nollywood, there was an attempt to chart a trend from a historical survey of the rise and development of the industry. The point has been established that the transition from Igbo to English language films opened a wide vista for artists of other ethnic extractions, apart from Igbo and Yoruba, to gain prominence in the industry.

It was also posited that since the Igbo filmmakers provided the economic base for the industry to thrive, it has been easier

for artists of Igbo origin to gain stardom. This is understandable because of the ethnic factor in the Nigerian polity. Other trends in the industry delineated include the rise of directors, plagiarism in screen plays, stereotyping, improved artist fees, formation of professional guilds, development of an iconography, marketing and distribution strategies, piracy and censorship, co-productions, and popularisation of film awards. Employment opportunities, revenue generation for broadcast and advertising industries, and production approaches, make up the rest developmental trends.

In conclusion, it can be stated that there is a contemporary film industry in Nigeria, popularly called Nollywood, no matter what some critics may say to the contrary. It will thus amount to playing the ostrich if an industry that is said to be worth over forty billion naira is glossed over. The point to note is that serious attention to the issue of application of genre, strategic marketing, and adherence to global best practices would go a long way in improving standards in this booming industry in Nigeria, which has the prospects of being a high revenue earner, surpassing crude oil in the area of direct foreign investments and earnings.

Part 3



Epic and Historical Films in the Reconstruction of the Nigerian Past in Nollywood: A Critical Reading of *Igodo* and *Egg of Life*

3.1 Introduction

This part attempts a detailed study of the epic and historical genre in Nollywood. This starts from a preliminary study of the nature of history and its use in the reconstruction of a people's past; and it also entails examining the use of oral tradition as a source of history and film as history. Two films, *Igodo* and *Egg of Life*, as productions that are reflective of this film movement in the industry, have been selected. The choice was informed by the production trends identified in part two. It is argued that while *Igodo* stands out as the first commercially viable epic film that was well received by the viewing public, *Egg of Life* was produced more or less as the feminine version of *Igodo*, probably in an attempt to give the Nigerian woman a pride of place in films. In other words, with the success of *Igodo*, the production of *Egg of Life* was more or less a quick response to the economics of the contemporary Nigerian film industry.

3.2 The Nature of History

Over the years, history has been defined in different ways by different historians. In doing this, they have defined history according to their peculiar interest, which is understandable. This is in the sense that several definitions of history have tended to emphasise one aspect or the other of the areas that history is concerned with. Basically, history centres on events as well as the thoughts of man that have occurred in the remote and immediate past, concerning man and his sociocultural and physical environment.

However, history is usually selective in its areas of studies. This is why there are historians who deal with various aspects of human endeavour, ranging from the political, economic, social, religious and aesthetic life, to specialised subjects, such as science and technology, culture, and so on. There is no doubt that this development has given rise to the concept of interdisciplinary studies in modern history. Every aspect of history investigates the activities of both individuals and society. Selectivity also exists concerning the kinds of events that are reported. Indeed, it is those events which the carrier or narrator in the society considers important that are reported. Incidentally, a particular historian cannot report all events that had happened in the past in a society; it is the judgement as to what is important (and needs attention) that gives rise to subjectivity in historiography.

History also deals with groups, such as human settlements, ethnic groups, city-states, and nations of the world or the world itself. When the subject of historical research centres on the life and act of an individual exclusively, it is called a biography. Furthermore, history consists essentially of chronicling events in a sequential manner within a chronological framework, which explains why dates are very important in the study of history. The association of events with dates makes the dates important. Thus, contemporary times place emphasis on a clear understanding of the nature and sequence of events, as well as the cause and effect relationship of these events, to the critical analysis of the significance of these events to the present day life of the people, and planning for the future in order to avoid

the mistakes of the past. This underpins the popular dictum in contemporary social commentaries that, “those who fail to learn from history, have planned to fail in life.”

Claude Ake, an erudite political scientist, amplifies this position when he states that,

Since human beings and society are susceptible to change and appear to lack the uniformity of physical objects and to develop in an autonomous manner, our options for ‘generalising’ them are severely limited. We are largely confined to comparing them at different points in time and stages of evolution; we cannot avoid anchoring social science scholarship on historical and developmental analysis ... We do not really fully understand something without knowing its ‘natural history,’ without knowing how it has come to be what it is (Ake, 1990, p.19).

According to Ake, the historical process is actually the process of reason. He cites Joseph Schumpeter as saying in *A History of Economic Analysis* that,

Nobody can hope to understand the economic phenomena of any, including the present epoch, who has not an adequate command of historical facts and an adequate amount of historical sense or of what may be described as historical experience (Ake, 1990, p. 20).

Ake further opines that in studying man in society, the social scientist is necessarily studying history; and that history is the laboratory against which the social scientist must test and consolidate his knowledge about the social world. In his view, the historian is not interested in formulating general theories or in making predictions; rather, he is interested principally in finding out what happened and in describing what happened in all its detail (Ake, 1990, p. 22).

It can then be surmised that, history is interested in events that happened in the past, which are relevant to situations created by natural phenomena and human achievement. Thus, historians are involved in recording, understanding and explaining events concerning all aspects of human endeavour in a chronological manner, highlighting the cause and effect

relationship between events and circumstances. The process of historical analysis will be eventually related to the practical developments in Nollywood.

3.2.1 Sources of History

Alagoa (1984; 1987), Andah (1987), and Erim (1984), among others, have identified four major ways in the documentation of African history, namely, oral traditions, material culture, historical linguistics, and writing.

- a) *Oral Tradition*: This is a method used to preserve and transmit the history of a people by word of mouth from one generation to the next. Oral tradition refers to information about the past transmitted by word of mouth in a chain from person to person, from the past to the present.
- b) *Material Culture*: Historical events or situations can also be preserved in the items of a people's material culture. The recovery and analysis of this source of historical information is undertaken by Archaeology. It is also referred to as pre-history in the sense that it is history before writing became in vogue. The materials dug out do not refer to particular persons; rather, one can use them to reconstitute the labels of a people and their cultures unlike history which centres on persons and events.
- c) *Historical Linguistics*: This is the study of the changes in the languages of people in order to discover the history that produced the changes, using the resources of linguistics to get historical facts.
- d) *Writing*: This is the recording of words and ideas in a medium that can be preserved as a documentation of a people's history. Indeed, in all societies where writing was invented, its use was at first restricted to religious groups, and later became useful for political purposes, particularly in centralised state systems and much later for trading purposes.

3.2.2 Oral Tradition and Historical Reconstruction

Oral tradition, as a source of historiography, is most abundant in Africa, basically because of the dependence on unwritten sources in documentation. Scholarly works like Adefuye (1987), Alagoa (1990; 1995), Chikwendu (1984), Henige (1987), and Martin (1984), note that oral tradition comes in two forms or categories, oral tradition and oral history. It is called oral tradition because the information does not belong to any particular person. Oral history, on the other hand, is information about the past which is not transmitted through a chain; rather, it is told by a participant as he/she saw, observed or absorbed it (the event). Oral history is more or less the same as contemporary history. However, one major problem with oral tradition is that it could lose details as time goes.

Two major ways of classifying oral traditions that have been identified by historians are fixed texts and free texts. Fixed texts are memorised, sung or recited songs, poems, and proverbs, among others; while free texts are not limited to a particular way of telling the story. Clark's *The Ozidi Saga* (1966) is a very good example here. This is a folk tale that was narrated, among the Ijaws all over the Niger Delta, in seven nights, with the various songs and dramatisations ably directed by the narrator/story-teller, thus giving the community a week-long community theatre entertainment, especially during festive periods. According to Alagoa (2005, p. 3), one limitation that is associated with oral traditions is that of chronology. This is in the sense that it has no definitive chronology – the old man or woman cannot tell specific dates for events being narrated. What obtains in the use of oral traditions in historical documentation is relative chronology – the calendric dates are relative and are not definitive. In other words, the source would use major historical events to do the dating. Also, the dates and times are not in any particular order, and it is the place of the historian to discover the relative chronology and present them logically. This is a way to create genealogy for a given community.

Martin states that the attainment of independence by African countries meant that the study of African history also assumed

independence because many scholars realised that, “the oral traditions transmitted from past generations and recounted by African traditional historians were valid and important sources for historical reconstruction” (Martin, 1984, p. 69). This has led to a situation where there is due attention and dependence on oral tradition, through complex and sometimes difficult periods of analysis and interpretation. This explains why one issue that has been very contentious, always generating interest in historical analysis, is the approach of the scholar. The question has been whether the historian could inject his personal opinion in his writing or he could afford to distance his personal disposition in the analysis. This appears to be the crux of the argument as to the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity in the work of historians. The fact is that history deals with events and issues that are considered significant; it is consequently selective by nature; but the question as to what is significant and not significant is left with the historian. It is for this reason that objectivity is an important issue in history. In the same vein, a good historian would make conscious effort to minimise the degree of subjectivity in his work.

3.3 Film as History

The film medium has gradually become an invaluable source of historical documentation. Apart from the documentary film genre, filmmakers have directed their energies towards using historical events as subject matter for feature film productions. There are many reasons why filmmakers, like novelists and dramatists, choose their subject matters from historical events. Some of them include:

- * to document particular events, just as a documentary film, so that viewers would remember the history surrounding such events.
- * to recreate actual past events, probably to support a message that such real historical events did not themselves convey; and
- * to simply emphasise particular past events in order to bring them closer to the present generation (Bernstein, p. 31).

The above underpins Bernstein's position that in the Hollywood experience, something strange haunts the cultural landscape of America. The strange development is, in his opinion, that moviemakers and television producers have become the most powerful, though perhaps not the most careful historians of our times. According to him, the concern is borne out of the realisation that more people are getting their history, or what they think is history, from movies rather than standard history books (Bernstein, p. 31). Consequently, his fear is that if historical facts are not presented as they should, chances are that people would get wrong impressions about such documented historical events. The question then is whether a filmmaker, like the novelist, should have the artistic licence to use the material of history selectively and partially in the goal of entertaining, creating a good dramatic product, and even forging what is sometimes called the poetic truth, a truth truer than literal truth (Bernstein, p. 32).

The artist, Bernstein argues, is an interpreter, not a reporter; a seeker after meaning, perhaps a prophet, but not a scribe; and so, the invention or rearrangement of details does not matter. In his view, there is the difficulty of knowing the underlying truth because,

... even poetic truth is a mere handy justification for the historical fabrication if it derives from a wilful disregard of the facts of history ... The recent past does suggest the sacredness of scrupulous, sober remembering, of the need to treat the past as a vessel that cannot be filled with whatever combination of truth and falsehood can compete (Bernstein, p. 32).

Furthermore, movies and television have become the most powerful media of mass communication because of their aesthetic elements. The combination of sight, sound and motion by film and television make their representation of reality very vivid to the audience. Somehow, the point is not whether a particular historical detail is correct or not; and some of the questions Bernstein poses are:

Do the metaphors drawn by the movie give the viewer the feeling that this is the way things really felt to the

participants of the moment? Does the film reflect, not literal historical truth, but the truth as human meaning, the significance of events? (p. 34).

Based on the foregoing, Bernstein argues that the substitution of fictions for facts in a film, when real historical events are the ostensible subject, is a trick played on the audience which has no way of distinguishing one from the other. He posits thus:

Good history consists of a judicious weighing of facts and sources; it is an impartial sifting of the record in which truthfulness is the highest value. Many written histories founder precisely on the absence of this essential judiciousness with sources and interpretation, and here too, with their almost inevitable minglings of what did happen with what might have happened with what almost certainly did not happen, the movies fail as history as well (p. 35).

The poser, in the final analysis, is if it is necessary to fictionalise, and whether it is worth it. This is pertinent because, sometimes, facts could be more dramatic and speak for themselves. The submission of Bernstein is apt as he states that in a film,

when artists, intentionally or not, distort the known facts to get an effect, either political or commercial, they are on the wrong side of the line between poetic truth and historical falsification. Artists who present as fact things that never happened, who refuse to allow the truth to interfere with the good story, are betraying their art and history as well (p. 35).

In the glorious years of cinema in Nigeria, filmmakers had also drawn subject matters extensively from contemporary histories in their films. Eddie Ugbomah appears to have blazed the trail as he has to his credit films like *Bolous 80* (based on the 1975 Justice Jerome Udoji Award, which sparked off high inflation rates); *The Rise and Fall of Dr. Oyenusi* (based on the armed robbery exploits of Oyenusi, who held Nigerians to ransom and virtually made both the bourgeoisie and the masses live in palpable fear for a long time); and *Death of a Black President* (based on the Friday, February 13, 1976, assassination of Gen. Murtala Muhammed, the then Nigerian Head of State,

which brought Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo to power as military Head of State). Sule Umar's *Maitaisine* (dealing with the Maitaisine riots in the mid-1980s that engulfed the northern part of the country), is also another film of the cinema era.

Significantly, *Sango: The Legendary King* (Lasode, 1997), *Aba Women Riot* (Ugbomah, 1999), *King Jaja of Opobo* (Okoh & Agina, 1999), *Slaves* (Chico Ejiro, 1999), *Queen Amina* (Okoh, 1999), and *Amazing Grace* (Jeta Amata, 2006), are some Nigerian films based on historical events or characters. The film, *Anini*, for example, is based on the exploits of Lawrence Anini, alias "De Law," an armed robbery king-pin from Edo State, who declared war on the Nigeria Police because of a supposed betrayal of trust on the part of the police. Anini held the people of the state and beyond by the jugular for many months before he was eventually arrested in Benin, while spending time with his girlfriend. Like Ugbomah did during the golden years of the cinema industry, the trend has since changed to documentation of contemporary histories, apparently for pecuniary reasons. Once there is a major event that shakes the nation to its foundation, the EPs quickly churn out films based on that subject. This explains why we have productions like *The Stubborn Grasshopper* (based on late Gen. Sani Abacha), *Orija Shrine* (Chikere, 2004) (based on the Okija shrine affair), *Issakaba* (Imasuen, 2001) (based on the activities of the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante group that had become a law unto itself), and *The Incumbent* (based on the political scenario in Anambra State, parodying the travails of Dr. Chris Ngige, erstwhile governor of the state), among others.

In expressing serious concern about this phenomenon, Onwordi observes that contemporary Nigerian filmmakers are fond of telling history in a hurry:

In these movies and especially in the peculiar way they capture topical events and happenings, Nigerian moviemakers are acting as chronicles of our times. In capturing the follies and foibles of our political class; the shenanigans of our elites; the shamanism and charlatanism of our religious leaders, these movies are building up impressive bodies of works that would serve

the interested researcher well in days to come.... These movies however pose a serious threat and challenge to the written word by the sheer force of their fast-tracked production and immediacy (Onwordi, 2003, p. 2).

In the view of Onwordi, the topicality of the subjects of these films translates to financial gains on the part of producers. Interestingly, he had predicted at the time of his writing as follows:

In years to come when the GSM fever would have died down and the phenomenon has become as commonplace as other aspects of our quotidian existence, we will watch movies like *GSM Wahala* and remember the early days of the phenomenon and the fever of excitement it evoked (Onwordi, 2003, p. 1).

It is pertinent to note here that this prophecy has since come to pass as we have seen films like, *GSM Wahala* (Okereke, 2002), *The GSM Connection* (Imasuen, 2003), and *GSM Lomo* (Olatunde, 2003), among others. Consequently, it can be posited that the challenge facing the filmmaker in historical works, in the first instance, is presenting history as it happened, and maintaining historical truth as much as possible. The emphasis here is that such works could be reference points for the establishment of historical facts. This entails the historian being as objective as humanly possible to ensure that the facts of history are not obfuscated.

3.4 The Nature of the Epic Film

It has been noted earlier that the epic film is a genre that features expensive production values and dramatic themes. The name is derived from the grand themes, stories and characters of epic poetry, and is often referred to as sword and sandal films. The epic, very often, takes historical or imagined events, myths, legendary or heroic figures, and adds extravagant settings and lavish costumes, accompanied by grandeur and spectacle and sweeping musical scores. Epic films are sometimes called costume dramas, historical dramas, war film epics, medieval romps, or period pictures. The fact is that as historical films,

which recreate past events, epics are expensive and lavish to produce. This is in the sense that they require elaborate and panoramic settings, on-location filming, authentic period costumes, inflated action on a massive scale, and large casts. As a point of fact, epics are tales that often cover a large expanse of time, set against a vast, panoramic backdrop, and in an episodic manner, they follow the continuing adventures of the heroes (or heroines), who are presented in the context of great historical events of the past.

It can be argued that since epics attempt to often rewrite history, they suffer from inauthenticity, fictitious recreations, excessive religiosity, hard-to-follow details and characters, romantic dream worlds, ostentatious vulgarity, political correctness, and leaden scripts. Very often, historical accuracy is sacrificed when the chronology is telescoped or modified, and the political/historical forces take a back seat to the personalisation and ideological slant of the story ("Epic film," 2007b, p. 1). The stories of epics centre predominantly on quests that the characters embark on over the course of the film and, to a large extent, they also comprise large casts, although not always ensemble casts ("Epic film," 2007a, p.1).

As it were, the definition of epic has been broadened over the years to include films that in general have a large scale or scope of history, time, or events, even when not venturing out to epic adventures. Many refer to any film that is long (over two hours) as an epic, and as such, a definition of an epic film is a matter of dispute among many ("Epic film," 2007a, p.1). Nonetheless, the word epic in recent years has become synonymous with big budget **B** picture. As Roger Ebert put it,

What you realise watching *Lawrence of Arabia* is that the word epic refers not to the cost or the elaborate production, but to the size of the ideas and vision. Werner Herzog's *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* did not cost as much as the catering in *Pearl Harbor*, but it is an epic, and *Pearl Harbor* is not (as cited in "Epic film," 2007a, p.1).

3.5 Historical Reconstruction through Epic/Historical Films

In Hollywood, according to Widdicombe (1994), storytelling has acquired a cult status to the extent that scriptwriters and editors determine the budget of films. One genre which has always made impact because of the human and material demands is the epic or historical films. It is seen as discovering legends in our lifetime, in the sense that such productions bring to concrete realities, images of our past heroes or communities. Widdicombe states that having studied several stories from almost every culture, Christopher Vogler, as newly appointed story analyst for Disney's Animation Division in 1985, wrote a memo to the management. In it, Vogler surmised that there was a universal story form – a mythic structure; and that it had existed since stories were first told and was present in the prevailing blockbuster movies. Disney's development executives took up the memo, and other studios were to follow suit. Vogler later put down his findings under the title, *The Winter's Journey*. Incidentally, many writers had managed to hit on the same formula before, more by instinct than anything else.

According to Widdicombe, Vogler's job schedule at Disney had led him to read fairy-tales, epic poems, and Norse and Celtic myths, as well as novels and comics; and he noticed common elements, including familiar characters and situations. From a reading of the American mythologist, Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell had discovered a monomyth, which he called, "the Hero's Journey." Widdicombe states that Vogler analysed the concept and identified 12 stages of the journey, thus:

1. The journey begins in the *Ordinary World*.
2. The hero is in some ways incomplete or unsatisfied, and is presented with the *Call to Adventure*.
3. The hero's first reaction is *Refuse the Call*.
4. *Enter the Mentor* to encourage the reluctant hero to prepare for the journey.
5. The hero becomes committed by *Crossing the First Threshold*.

6. He enters into a world where different rules apply and *Tests, Allies and Enemies* are encountered.
7. After many adventures the hero comes to a dangerous place where that which is sought resides – the *Approach to the Inmost Cave*.
8. Inside the cave, he faces the *Supreme Ordeal*.
9. He takes possession of the *Reward*.
10. The dark forces regroup to endanger the *Road Back*.
11. There is one more ordeal of death and rebirth – the *Resurrection*, which must be faced before the hero can return.
12. He returns transformed, back to the ordinary world, with the treasure or lesson learned – the *Return with Elixir* (Widdicombe, 1994, p. 4) (Italics not in original).

In the analysis of Widdicombe, Campbell produced a complex narrative model in the hero's journey; but Vogler simplified it to "an adaptation for film model." To Vogler, the Supreme Ordeal lies at the heart of the hero's journey:

The secret is that heroes must die so they can be reborn. In many stories, this 'death' is metaphorical, an experience that transforms. Death and rebirth is the 'story' that has been told and retold through the ages of man. Campbell, who was deeply influenced by Jung, traced it back to the earliest myths and believed the journey was an inherited form, part of the "collective unconsciousness" (Widdicombe, 1994, p. 2).

According to Widdicombe, Vogler stated that these stories with structures evolved as survival tools. Storytelling was (and is still, to some extent) a way of preparing the young for the ordeal of leaving the community to hunt, farm, fish, or gather firewood. The Resurrection, the second ordeal at the climax of most stories, may have had origins in ritual purification of returning hunters, often involving periods of quarantine in a dark place, a symbolic death before rebirth into the community. To Vogler, these stories appeal to the urban man because they appear "genetically encoded," and that one could identify with the story because one is also on the journey. He thus warns that the formula is a buried roadmap rather than a cookbook; and

that the deeply embedded story should act as a blueprint (Widdicombe, 1994, p. 3).

The need to create fine and satisfactory storylines in bulk has made creating stories a very big business, even in Nollywood. Little wonder then that writers in Hollywood and other more advanced film cultures rely on story analysts' books explaining the basic structure with advice on where to put turning points and inciting incidents for maximum effect. This method, which is reflective of intellectual and creative bankruptcy, could be responsible for the formulaic approach or stereotypical nature of many films. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are several disturbing cases of crass plagiarism, as an EP could just drop a VCD copy of a foreign film on the table of a scriptwriter and ask him to produce a Nigerian version in a couple of days. This explains why Brian Gibson, a Hollywood director, points out how difficult it is to produce a good script, stating that, "writing one (a fine script) is extraordinarily difficult to do – a good script needs its own voice, its own vision, thematic consistency and novel characters ... and all in 110 pages" (Widdicombe, 1994, p. 3).

The point to note here, according to Widdicombe, is that, "understanding the archetypes can help you to make your story more powerful – and avoid the clichés" (Widdicombe, 1994, p. 4). It is in the above light that an analysis of *Igodo* and *Egg of Life* will be attempted subsequently. This is to see how both films have unconsciously adopted or adhered to this principle of the hero's journey.

3.6 The Development of the Epic Genre Films in Nollywood

Nigerian epic films are those narrative film texts whose screenplays are derived from legends, myths, folklore/tales, and mores/lore of the people. Though most of the screenplays are derived from oral narratives, they are adapted to the specific possibilities offered by the film medium. In most cases, they try to recapture the pre-historic or pre-civilisation eras in the life of the people. The visual interpretations are tailored to achieve these objectives through the costumes, props, make-up, and the

settings. They present fantasies of bygone eras that serve as historical reference points in their outlook (Asiegbu, 2007, p. 6).

In the annals of the contemporary Nigerian film industry, the first epic video film is *Missing Mask* (Okoh, 1994). Though not a commercial success, *Missing Mask* told the story of the pre-Christianity era in a hinterland Igbo community. The film portrays the ordeal of a woman who attempts to save her twin babies from being killed as the custom demanded. Other epic films include, *Battle of Musanga* (Dawodu, 1996), *Sango: The Legendary King* (Lasode, 1997), *Ngene* (Okoh, 1998), *Igodo* (Amenechi & Obaseki, 1999), *Ijele* (Amenechi, 2000), *Ojadike* (Amenechi, 2000), *Ebube* (Amenechi, 2002), *Eye of the Gods* (Amenechi, 2002), *Lion King* (Amenechi, 2003), *Egg of Life* (Amenechi, 2003), and *Eagle's Bride* (Onyeka, 2005), to mention a few.

However, some subgenres of the epics appear to have emerged. This explains why the epic genre in Nollywood can be categorised into three main subgenres, namely, historical epics, legendary epics, and fantasy epics. This categorisation is based on the themes of the epic film texts. Though the sub-genres share the characteristics of the epic, they differ in themes and purposes. The historical epics, for example, are mostly dramatisations or recreations of identifiable histories of the people, which are often spiced because filmmakers take advantage of the dramatic licence. The implication here is that directors embellish history with fiction in such films. The historical epics are also very relevant, especially in providing opportunities for viewers to have contact with our cultures and our past. Films like *Maitatsine*, *Amazing Grace*, *Battle of Musanga*, and *Aba Women Riot*, fall into this category.

The legendary epics, on the other hand, are dramatisations of legends and legendary figures. Epic films in this category deal with known stories of the people or individual heroes of history. Asiegbu notes that legendary and historical epics are interrelated and that a film can also straddle the two subgenres. The reason is that legends are history and a legendary story can only be told in the context of history; and the legends of a people tell the story of the people from ancient times. It may be

about their heroes, wars, mystic occurrences, myths, or victories and defeats (Asiegbu, 2007, pp. 45-46). It is worth emphasising that to successfully recreate historical events or legends, filmmakers rely on sets, props, costumes, make-up, and locations to recreate spectacles that can match the splendours of the olden days. Asiegbu avers that the combination of these elements add extra-cultural dimension to the films and the stories themselves; and that in most cases, the subject matters treated in these films are facts from oral traditions (Asiegbu, 2007, p. 47). Productions like *Amina*, *King Jaja of Opobo*, *Emotan*, and *Sango* are some Nigerian films in this category.

Finally, the fantasy epic genre deals with such subject matters that exist in folk tales and folklore. In the real sense, fantasy is a product of the creative imagination of an artist (or writer), who creates situations that may or may not have existed. That is why the fantasy subgenre in epic films is mostly impressionistic and surrealistic in its representations. In it, there is great dependence on folk tale, folklore, myths, and legends. The intention may be to inculcate morals in society based on the theme of the story or to eulogise and stamp a notion about the valour and the strength of the community or legend to society. The scope of this form is normally larger than life and traverses vast areas in worlds, nations, towns, as well as natural and human orders (Asiegbu, 2007, p. 49). Films which can be classified here include *Igodo*, *Ngene*, *Ijele*, *Ojadike*, *Ebube*, *Eye of the Gods*, and *Egg of Life*.

However, Asiegbu supports the position that the success of *Igodo* in the market, as well as its popularity among the viewing public, drew the attention of producers to the epic as a form of narrative in film production. Coincidentally, *Igodo* has remained a paradigm for epics since its release because other films of the epic genre derived mostly from what it offered in terms of visual interpretation. Thus, Asiegbu hinges the success of *Igodo* on the following reasons:

The costume, make-up, props, and sets used in the film (*Igodo*) helped to define the characters as well as fantasise the story. They also helped in dating the story in terms of removing it from the present (Asiegbu, 2007, p. 51).

It is in the above light that a critical reading of *Igodo*, as a pacesetter in the epic genre in Nollywood, and *Egg of Life*, its gendered version, will be attempted. The reading of the films will be premised on the basic principles of filmic experience. By this, one is referring to the plot structure, the thematic pre-occupation, point of view, characterisation, costumes, make-up and sound design, camera techniques, visual effects, as well as the editing. Michael Rabiger aptly encapsulates this phenomenon when he states that,

The screen communicates in multiple ways. The printed page at least stands still as you analyse it, while film language is a complex interplay of moving images accompanied by the infinite modifiers of words, symbols, sounds, color, movement, and music (Rabiger, 2003, p.193).

3.7 A Critical Reading of *Igodo: Land of the Living Dead*

Igodo (1999), scripted by Don Pedro Obaseki and Kabat Esosa Egbon, is produced by Ojiofor Ezeanyaeche and directed by Andy Amenechi and Don Pedro Obaseki. In the opening sequence of the film, there is wailing and gnashing of teeth all over the kingdom. The people seek the counsel of the gods as the dibia (Charles Ukpang) is consulted. The revelation is that the gods are silent; and that, “only one man knows it all ... Igodo at Igbulu.” On the orders of the Igwe (Amaechi Muonagor), Igodo, now an old man (Eze Okorie), is brought to the palace and he reveals that, fifty seasons ago, the gods visited the land of Umuoka with a harvest of deaths to an extent that no one knew what to do. Subsequently, the story of Umu-Igodo, the land of the living dead unfolds. Spanning three generations, the story is that across the great mountains of Arochukwu, on the hills where Amadioha sits, a child is born, and he is named Ihekumere, meaning, “a great thing has happened.” The child is dedicated to Amadioha, the god of thunder. Young Ihekumere (Ojo Segun) is divined to be the next Igwe of the land but this is resisted by some persons. He becomes a victim

of conspiracy as there is a plot to abduct him, to forestall his ascension to the throne; in the process, both parents are killed. The boy escapes and is found in Umuoka by a childless hunter, Ezeoke (Mike Manafa), who brings him up as his son. He becomes a citizen of Umuoka, growing up to become a very wealthy man (Mike Odiachi). Unfortunately, Ezeoke, the man Ihekumere looked upon as his father dies; and quite naturally, his (Ihekumere's) wealth becomes an issue of jealousy, as a plot is engineered by a group of seven (Gogo Ombo Gogo, Tony Akposheri, Achor Ugoenyi, Lucky Ovuakporaye, Ferdinand Ohams, David Ihesie, and Emeka Aningwu). They hide the staff of office of the Igwe, who decrees that if found, the culprit should be buried alive up to the head. The plotters accuse Ihekumere of stealing the staff and bring out the staff from his house, thus making him the culprit. Despite his protests of innocence, he is bound with a stick, led to the forest, and punished as decreed by the Igwe.

Predictably, the kingdom experiences retributive justice about fifty years after, as Amadioha weeps for his son. The perpetrators end up one way or the other: hang, drown, die by the roadside, die in a bush path, and die in the bush; while the seventh, Ijenwa, lies helplessly on his bed, a living dead. Furthermore, the sins of the fathers are visited on the people as the community experiences chains of deaths. There are regular funeral processions for one prominent person or the other that die in the kingdom. The old dibia divines that the curse on the land can only be revoked if the giant tree is cut down. Neither axe nor machete could bring down the tree, except the knife that was used to sever Ihekumere's body, which lies in the hills of Amadioha. He warns that until this is done, all first sons of Umuoka, home and abroad, would continue to die. It is also revealed that, "a deed done by seven can only be atoned for by seven." The seven young men selected to save the village are: Egbuna – the hunter (Sam Dede), Agu – the warrior (Charles Okafor), Okonta – the climber (Ignis Ekwe), Nwoke – the drummer (Prince James Uche), Igodo – the flutist (Norbert Young), Ikenna – the wrestler (Obi Madubogwu), and Izu – the farmer (Chidi Mokeme).

As directed, on *eke* (market) day, the chosen seven gather; but Egbuna (Sam Dede) refuses to join them. He is angry that the elders did not intercede when his father's land was taken and given to Nwoke. However, Egbuna realises too late that the gods are quick in dealing with disobedience because tragedy visits his home – his son, Dume, is killed by a tiger in the bush. Furthermore, his wife (Rita Edochie) sees a vision of a white ram in the sky. He eventually joins the selected persons and the chief priest (Pete Edochie) prepares and fortifies them for the journey.

While they are away on the journey, facing many tribulations, there is apprehension back home in the kingdom. Twenty market days after the chosen seven had left the kingdom in search of the knife, the people ask the old Igwe (Joe Layode), to do something fast. In the face of the helplessness of the Igwe, there is mob action – they opt to use axe to cut down the tree. Surprisingly, as they cut the tree, it bleeds, just as the Igwe's leg bleeds in the palace.

Finally, Egbuna (Sam Dede), Agu (Charles Okafor), and Igodo (Norbert Young) get to the cave, only to be confronted with the question of personal sacrifice for the salvation of the whole village. This is the requisite posed by the guardian of the cave (Martins Njubigbo), before they can get the knife. Agu does not see any sense in it, arguing that they did not come that far to commit suicide. Igodo, on the other hand, sees personal sacrifice as a veritable way of atonement for his guilt – while on the way, he had killed Okonta (Ignis Ekwe), whom he had thought to be an animal coming out of the bush. Eventually, the tragic hero, Egbuna, who is an epitome of selfless leadership, opts to sacrifice himself, to show that he is an exemplary leader. As Igodo blows his flute to spur him, Egbuna enters the sacred groove. His blood is thus used to wash away the sins of the land because the way opens and they (Igodo and Agu) get the knife. Unfortunately, only Igodo makes it back to Umuoka to present the knife. The village is again thrown into mourning because of the sacrifice of six able-bodied young men. The Igwe declares that Umuoka would from that day be known as, Umu-Igodo. The action cuts to the present, as old Igodo says, “that was the

pains of sacrifice of blood we made; the sins of the father; determine the crime, find the culprit.”

It is worth noting that the place to begin, in discussing an epic, is the structure of the epic genre. It has been observed, in the course of this study, that the hero's journey begins from the ordinary world; the hero is, in some ways, incomplete and dissatisfied with the present state, and this calls for an adventure. In the case of *Igodo*, it is not the question of an ordinary adventure; the quest entails embarking on a journey into an unknown world to retrieve a knife, which symbolises the instrument of redemption for the people of Umuoka. In the hero's journey, the next step is, “enter the mentor.” In *Igodo*, we see the old dibia (Pete Edochie) as the mentor. He gives the seven young men some tips for the adventure:

PRIEST: Whatever you see or hear, don't look back; if you do, you shall die ... In times of trouble, don't help anybody; if you do, you shall die ... In the waters of silence, don't utter any word ... and don't take darkness for light ...

A critical reading of the film shows that it is structured in three phases. The phase of the ancient story, where Ihekumere is murdered; that which covers the period of the quest by the seven, which can also be referred to as the early period of European incursion into Africa; and that of the modern age where there is a re-occurrence of a harvest of deaths. The birth of Ihekumere marks the beginning of the first story; the second starts when the child is found; and the third is when there is a convoy of ambulances carrying caskets, coming from the city to Umu-Igodo.

The predominant theme in *Igodo* is sacrificial leadership, as reflected in the character of Egbuna (Sam Dede). It is common knowledge that Nigeria has been in search of selfless leadership since independence. Rotimi, for example, examines this question of credible leadership in his works, taking the option of collective leadership, as exemplified in the character of Harcourt-Whyte in *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988). Egbuna is portrayed as an unwilling leader, who is virtually forced to assume a leadership position. In other words, he is not overambitious by nature and

does not take delight in perpetuating himself in office. Once he accepts the mantle of leadership, he goes all out to ensure the fulfilment of his responsibility as an ideal leader. When the time comes for one of the three survivors to pay the supreme price, through personal sacrifice, Egbuna gladly offers to do that to show that leadership is all about service and sacrifice. This is despite the fact that Igodo also wants to pay the supreme price, for him to atone for his accidental killing of Okonta. Egbuna boldly offers himself, so that Igodo, whom he sees as a potential leader, would take the knife back to the village to remove the curse on the land. Furthermore, there is the theme of unity in any attempt at finding solutions to communal problems. The film espouses the view that unity is essential, especially in periods of crises. This explains why at moments of disagreements in *Igodo*, the young men on the quest always bury the hatchet in order to move ahead. Egbuna, as a leader, makes members of the group realise the essence of unity in their collective existence.

On another level, *Igodo* deals with the purgation of collective guilt in a traditional African community. A crime that is committed in a community haunts the future generation. This is attributable to the cry of innocence by Ihekwumere, when he is buried alive. It is not surprising therefore that the old dibia (Pete Edochie) divines that all first sons of Umuoka would continue to die unless the curse on the land is revoked. As it were, the curse can only be revoked if the giant tree is cut down, and neither axe nor machete can do it; only the knife that was used to sever Ihekwumere's body. Of interest again is the fact that seven persons have to embark on the journey since, in the words of the chief priest, "A deed done by seven can only be atoned for by seven."

This brings us to the aspect of characterisation in the film. In the first instance, it is imperative to take cognisance of the symbolic element of the number "7." It had been noted that seven men conspired to accuse and kill Ihekwumere; also, seven men are chosen for the quest to save the community. The number, "7," in African traditional belief system, is a mythical figure. It is a symbol of perfection. Although seven of them go on the journey, only one returns with the knife. Again, the

number, “1” (one), is a symbol of initiation; it is the beginning of the counting process: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and so forth. Seven persons go for the quest but only one comes back; and, of course, one could recall the injunctions that preceded the journey; “Don’t look back ... Don’t help one another ... Don’t take light for darkness ...”

The character of Egbuna (Sam Dede) is very important in the film. It has been observed that Egbuna is a symbol of sacrificial leadership, not the selfish kind of leadership that Nigeria has witnessed over the years. Initially, Egbuna refuses the call to join in the quest because of a perceived act of injustice on the part of the elders. He is dissatisfied with their decision to give his father’s land to Nwoke. When the young men eventually embark on the quest, Egbuna, as the leader, makes the others realise the essence of unity, if they must achieve their mission. He helps the team at every point in time, all through the journey, to the moment of decision, where there is a call for personal sacrifice. He asks Igodo, the artist, to take mementoes to his family, and tells him to play the flute so that he would have the courage to pay the supreme price. This depicts him as a brave and visionary leader, who knows the potentials of a prospective successor.

Egbuna leads the group at various levels in the course of the journey, and does not abandon them in the face of dangers. He stands to fight against all the adversaries that militate against them. Apart from preserving unity, he exhibits exemplary leadership by either being in the front, telling the others not to look back, telling them to move on, stopping them from drinking water, or rescuing others. All of these are indications of how leadership should be displayed: it is leadership by example. When Igodo wants to sacrifice himself, Egbuna refuses and reminds them that he is the leader of the group, and that Igodo should not be sacrificing for him; rather, he should be sacrificing for Igodo. Egbuna is an epitome of leadership by example, not leadership of, “Do what I say; but not what I do.” As a leader, Egbuna exemplifies the messiah of Umuoka. In the sequence that precedes the preparation for the quest, his wife foresees what he is going to suffer, when she sees a vision of a white

ram. The implication is that Egbuna is going to be the symbol of the sacrificial lamb of the community. This is symbolic of the messianic role, which he plays in the community. A messiah is a leader who sacrifices himself in order to bring redemption to his community. Precisely, that is the role that Egbuna plays in *Igodo* – he sheds his blood for the restitution of the community.

It can also be said that Egbuna is a man who had been treated badly by his community. It informs his refusal to serve in the first instance. This is coterminous with the reluctance of good leaders to offer to serve in Nigeria; we are talking about people who come into public service with good intentions; such persons, we dare say, are not plentiful. Here was a man who was compelled to serve his community because some external forces used his son as a springboard to force him to embark on the quest for the knife used in killing Ihekwumere. His son is killed by a tiger. By the time he carries the dead body of the boy into his compound, his wife tells him of the sign of the ram in the clouds; and she warns that if he does not go for the quest, other misfortunes could follow. It can be argued that Egbuna is the tragic hero, as far as the film, *Igodo* is concerned. One also wonders why the name of *Igodo* is used as the title of the film. Would a title such as “Egbuna” not have been more appropriate? He is exemplary in his leadership style and qualities; and, of course, his personal sacrifice is very significant. The truth is that very few leaders can undertake this kind of sacrifice for their countries.

On the other hand, *Igodo* (Norbert Young) is the hero of the film, who returns with the knife to save the community. As a flutist, he plays the role of the artist in society, who has the responsibility of giving society a proper sense of direction. He gives the team inspiration with his flute music at various points in the perilous quest for the knife. An example is when they encounter the children of the night. When Egbuna offers to sacrifice himself, it is *Igodo* that provides the flute music, which acts as an impetus for him (Egbuna) to face death. *Igodo* is portrayed as a symbol of a righteous, humane person, who feels remorse for killing Okonta, the hunter. Here is a man who kills someone inadvertently and volunteers to pay for that killing.

It is true that the artist is one who recreates inner feelings or responses. The artist is usually an observer of life; and his place in society, as a mirror of society, is to bring people to an interface with social issues. It is not surprising, therefore, that Igodo (the artist) is the only one that lives to tell the story to the younger generation. In this regard, the film makes the point that the task of correcting past mistakes, the burden of saving society, and the impetus for moving society to a new level, rest on the artist. As the purveyor of society, the artist is usually the conscience of society and also the reservoir of the archival details of the community. Thus, Igodo informs the people that in time past, when such deaths occurred in the community, it was traced to the wrongful murder of a young man. Now, if people are dying again in the community, a crime, probably similar to that one, may have been committed in the community. Incidentally, Igodo is the grey-haired man in the modern story, where all the decors have changed to modern times. He narrates the story of the past. In essence, old Igodo (Eze Okorie) is the storyteller. Again, Igodo acts as the bridge between the past and the present in the story. For instance, the predominant character in the modern story is Igodo. The king is just there as a symbolic head, just like his father in the middle story. The old Igwe was just a symbolic head, who just provides that communal rallying point. He sends for the old dibia to find out what is causing the deaths in the community. It is the old dibia that divines and reveals the cause of the rampant deaths in the kingdom.

Looking at the second level, we encounter the story of Igodo as a young man, who successfully undertakes the quest to redeem his community alongside six other young men. Egbuna, as the leader, takes the sacrificial option; and this alone teaches us something vital as regards the modern story. It can be recalled that the story starts in ancient time and takes us to the modern time. In the modern story, Egbuna is no longer there; but Igodo serves as the linkage to the modern story. It can be recalled also that Egbuna gives his chain to Igodo to give to his wife; and he also sends his bracelet to his remaining surviving son. Consequently, when the story switches to the modern time, the person who now serves as the voice of wisdom, as if a carry-

over of the character of old dibia is now the bearded Igodo (Eze Okorie). The old sage now narrates a similar dilemma the community faced some fifty years ago. Old Igodo states that what brought about that calamity was the wrongful accusation and sacrifice of an innocent man. He opines that if people have started dying again in the community, there is need for soul-searching: somebody may have once again breached the bond that holds the community together. This bond is that an innocent blood should never be spilled because once an innocent blood is spilled, the spirit of that young man, who is wrongfully accused and killed, comes alive. Thus, the death in that community reminds him of what happened in the past and pricks his conscience.

From the above analysis, it can be argued that old Igodo becomes the symbol of wisdom in the community. This is in the sense that he tells the people that they should not break that communal bond, which they promised to hold on to the day he returned from the quest. They took that communal oath never to sacrifice an innocent blood; and if people are dying again, the way they died in the past, an oath has been broken. They should search themselves and get hold of the culprit(s). It can be argued also that though it is not pronounced in the film, it is suggestive that some ritual sacrifices may have been made and the soul(s) of the victim(s) may have been linked up with the soul of Ihekumere, who was sacrificed two generations earlier.

However, it is instructive that in the modern story, there is less emphasis on fortune-telling. At one point, the king sends for the young dibia; but it is not the counsel of the young dibia that is foregrounded. It is the wise counsel of Igodo, who has experience dating from the past that is highlighted, as if to say people need to use past history to guide themselves. The lesson here is that if a people throw away history, they will make the mistakes of the past and they will pay dearly for that negligence. In the past, people had been wrongfully accused and sacrificed; and the community was cursed. It took the sacrifice of six young men to bring succour. Now that people are frequently dying in their prime, there is need to find out whether there had been wilful sacrifice of innocent blood in the community. In fact, the

end of the film seems to signal events in the opening sequence where similar unexplainable deaths occurred in the community.

At this point, it is necessary to take a brief look at some of the other young men who embark on the quest. Among them, there is Izu, the foolish type, who does not adhere to the wise counsel of the old *dibia*. He looks back, forgetting the injunctions; he does not take cognisance of the warning that they should not “take light for darkness, and darkness for light.” Okonta escapes death at first, when he is saved by Egbuna in an evil groove, only to be inadvertently shot by Igodo, who mistakes him for an animal. Apparently, he may have strayed into the bush to ease himself. If he had not strayed into the bush, he would not have been killed. Agu, on the other hand is the aggressive and impatient type. At the groove of Amadioha, he is shocked that Igodo wants to sacrifice himself. He makes it clear that they did not come that far to commit suicide. As far as he is concerned, all they need do is kill the gate-keeper and take the knife. As a point of fact, most of those that die in the course of the quest, except Egbuna, die because of foolhardiness.

On the issue of personal sacrifice, there is something salient about the contributions of our unsung elder statesmen like the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The personal sacrifice of the seven reminds us about the sacrifice that people of the older generation made for the country. These are people that made supreme sacrifices; some of them who fought and died to keep the country one during the civil war, are forgotten. In other words, we seem to be going back to all those things that brought about the civil war: bribery, corruption, tribalism, nepotism, and so on. Thus, Igodo tells us that there is need for us to go back and learn from our history; there is need for us to be reminded that injustice, such as that against Ihekumere led to civil war in our country; and that if we are not careful, we would repeat the same mistakes of the past. There is a subtle indication of this fact in the story, and Igodo symbolises artists and historians, people who are sources of historical records. It explains why in the modern story, the people look for Igodo.

Incidentally, Igodo has become a recluse, and had gone to live in the jungle. Apparently, he does not want to have anything

to do with the rest of the society because his mates are not around anymore. He is confronted with the reality of young people who refuse to understand that at one point in time, something had happened, and he is the only survivor. It is not surprising that when he finishes his story, he gets up and walks away. His action may have been a reaction to the way many of our heroes go unsung. Present day leaders feel very reluctant to do things in memory of those who had sacrificed their lives for the country. In most cases, the highest honour they are given is naming a street or a public building after them. Unfortunately, once a leader's time is gone, people do not take him into reckoning. Since Igodo had saved his community, by right, the community owes him that respect; and he should occupy a pride of place in the community. Sadly, this is not the case. Although he is a chief in the modern story, he does not live in Umu-Igodo. For somebody of his status, he does not get the recognition he deserves; that is why he decides to live a secluded, quiet life.

It is also pertinent to look at the role of women in *Igodo*. This is to substantiate the point that women are used more as decorative objects in the film, especially in the palace. Egbuna's wife pleads with him to go on the quest to save the community; she also foresees what Egbuna is going to suffer when she sees a vision of a white ram. The women are just there to wail and cry upon their husbands, when they are about to go for the perilous quest, and at the end when Igodo returns. There is also the symbolisation of the death of Agu during the quest. When the wife is coming from the stream, she hits her foot on a stump and the water pot falls down from her head and breaks to pieces. This is a bad omen, and the woman laments, having a premonition that something terrible has happened to her husband. Another narrative element is the aspect of foreshadowing. An element that stands out importantly is the symbol of the lamb that Egbuna's wife sees as a vision. It is understandable then that at the end, Egbuna becomes that sacrificial lamb.

Trees play symbolic important roles in this epic. In the first place, trees constitute abodes for shelter and security. Also, people who are being pursued, who feel unsafe with their present

circumstances, find shelter under or on top of trees. For example, in the opening sequence of the film, Ihekumere seeks shelter on a tree while fleeing from his enemies. It is not surprising, therefore, that the impetus for the narrative action in the film is the plight of a child, who is running away from the people who had killed his parents. A tree provides him protection from his assailants; and he is found on top of a tree by a childless hunter, who brings him up as his own son; and the boy grows up to become a successful young man who is envied in the community. So, we have a child that is saved by a tree, and found on top of a tree; that heritage of having come from a tree is symbolised in the quest and the role which trees serve in the story.

It is noteworthy too that trees are used in the story to represent abodes for spirits. In other words, they are abodes for elemental and metaphysical forces, which are beyond human comprehension. The incidents of the community's revolt are cases in point. In the course of the quest, members of the community become restive as they are not sure if the young men would ever return with the knife. There is mob action as they insist that they have to go and cut down the tree. When they start cutting the tree, the tree bleeds and the king himself starts bleeding because the king symbolises that communal guilt. Until that element is healed, any attempt to bring down the tree will bring down the king and the entire kingdom itself. Thus, the tree represents three levels of meaning: as a shelter for the dispossessed; as a refuge for the persecuted; and also a symbolisation of the communal spirit. Consequently, cutting down the tree invariably means cutting down what holds the community together. The king says the people should not do it, but they do not listen to him; and as they cut the tree, the king begins to bleed.

Another salient aspect of the quest worth examining is the fact that all the men always look at trees and imagine that they are seeing things. This is because the trees, at every point in the quest, haunt their conscience. It can thus be submitted that it is their conscience that is actually haunting them; and that the trees are not really moving. By imagining things, their sub-consciousness weighs them down. Put simply, the sins of the

past pursue them all through the journey. It is observed that the camera vividly captures the symbolic roles of trees in the story. In moments of impending danger, the camera seems to be swinging (swift arcs or whip pan movements) as symbolic representation of the fact that the trees are inhabited by spirits, which are beyond human comprehension. The fact that they seem to feel the presence of spirits around them, with some dwelling on treetops, again symbolises where the young man who was persecuted comes from: he is a child of the forest. Interestingly, his hands are also tied with a tree branch, just like Jesus Christ on the cross, when he is led to the point where he is buried alive. Thus, when he (Ihekweumere) dies, it is assumed that his spirit returns to where he was rescued from. Furthermore, it is from the trees that young spirit children come to show them the way they should follow in the quest. It is from the top of trees that savages come to attack them. It is also from the tree that spirits come out to revive Igodo, the only survivor. So, symbolic representations, which can be drawn from the imagery of trees, keep multiplying in the film.

The symbolic importance of the trees is repeated at the end of the film, as Igodo is moving out of the palace. The striking thing is that we see children climbing on top of trees to gain vantage viewpoints from where they can see properly. Somehow, children represent the hope of tomorrow in the story. They do not share the level ground with the old people. To the children, climbing a tree is a way of having a clearer view of the palace and everything. It also gives them a better view of things: a view that is above the surface level. Being above the ground implies being above the murkiness of everyday life. These are children, not adults, who are expected to know good and evil. As a result, when they climb up, the implication is that they are morally lifted above the murkiness of this world, which is driven by commerce and greed.

There is also need to look at other symbolic elements that are tied to the concept of point of view (POV). Here, one is not just talking about point of view at the level of what is referred to as an element of narration. A POV shot means a shot is taken from a camera position, close to the sight line of a subject, to

imply that the camera is “looking” with the eyes of the subject. The camera, through its positioning and movements, sometimes invites us to see events, “through the eyes” of a character (Bordwell & Thompson, 1993, p. 243). This is the subjective view; and it can be seen at various points in *Igodo*. For example, when little Ihekumere is escaping from the assassins, the camera sometimes does the pursuing, through the bush path. When he climbs the tree, there is a high angle shot of his pursuers, from his POV. It has been noted earlier that the sweeping and arcing camera movement from a low angle, showing the top of trees, is a representation that the young men are imagining that they are seeing things on top of the trees; and that there is a correlation with their overburdened conscience. This one is different from the spirit children coming from the tree because the children that come from the tree are seen by them; but when they are looking up at the treetops, it is as if the evil deed is haunting them.

It is necessary to also take the level of analysis to aspects of costumes and décor, especially the décor of the king’s palace. In the ancient story, it is just merely implied from the kind of magnificent building used to indicate the king’s palace. By the middle portion of the story, the distinction between the king’s palace and the houses of his subjects become noticeable. The king’s house is built of cement, and the house is well roofed. It is a modern building with a zinc roof, indicating the intrusion of modernity and modern architecture, which is symbolised in the roofing. From a zoom out, in the sequence where the villagers gather in the palace to complain that the people who went for the quest had stayed too long, and insist on going to cut down the tree with axes, we see the transformation of the palace. As the camera zooms out for the crowd to move towards the tree, we see the modern architecture, the roofing and everything indicating that an element of modernity has set in. Still on the setting, there is need for us to link the above noted changes with the modern palace of the Igwe. In the middle portion of the story, the objects of decoration in the setting are instructive. The king is sitting right behind a leopard skin. A leopard is an animal that symbolises strength and agility; but

on one side of the throne, we notice that there is an antelope skin. This is an animal which symbolises gracefulness, especially in racing. It exhibits gracefulness in the way it runs without exerting too much energy. The two totemic animals are used to symbolise the power of the king: agility, power, and gracefulness. The king does not need to display his power in the manner in which our modern politicians display power. The king symbolises power without necessarily displaying it. He is an epitome of power, the kind of power that is identifiable with the leopard, for instance, which is very strong.

This brings us to the décor of the modern palace, where we find that there is a shift in paradigm. Whereas, the king in the modern story still retains the traditional objects symbolising the source of power for the kingdom, this time around, there is a shift in paradigm. Whereas the middle aspect of the story depicts the king sitting directly in front of the leopard skin, in the modern story, the leopard skin has been shifted towards screen left on a wall, farther away from the king. Another instrument of power has replaced it, the ivory. The elephant tusk is a symbol of wealth, which is tied to the monetary economy. The modern monetary economy is also reflected in the clothing of the king. The ancient king wears a matted crown; but this modern king has a beaded crown, signifying his wealth. A television set is also mounted beside him, an indication that the king is concerned with the trend and flow of information. This is indicative of the fact that, in the film, people are caught between tradition and modernity, and the source of that linkage is Igodo. He makes the people realise how an accusation and sacrifice of an innocent young man brought calamity upon the community. Even in their new-found wealth, represented in the king's modern palace, where there is television and very big elephant tusks, symbolising his wealth and everything, Igodo himself, as a chief, is differentiated from the other chiefs, with his own long red cap with white eagle feather on it. In traditional African societies, the eagle is a royal bird. A man can only wear the eagle feather on his cap if he is a very high chief, or if he has fought many battles, killed adversaries in inter-tribal or inter-communal wars, killed a wild animal like a lion, tiger, and so

on, and has done the “feather dance” (called, *ogbu*, in Izon). The counselling which old Igodo gives the people of Umu-Igodo, reminds us of the counsel of the old *dibia* in the middle story.

Other changes in the story are also worth noting. It will be recalled that in the ancient story, dead bodies are carried in stretchers; but in the modern story, the corpses are in caskets brought in ambulances. In this sequence, the Igwe still plays the rallying point, indicating continuities; somehow, the symbols of authority in the old palace have been displaced because we no longer see the skin of the leopard on the wall behind the throne. Instead, what adorns the modern palace is ivory, which symbolises the wealth of a rich king. Though his father was wealthy, he is represented as a very rich king in a modern era. Also, members of his council of chiefs are much more richly attired.

It is necessary for us to expatiate on the above by examining some aspects of costumes and accessories. At the beginning of the film, in the hills of Amadioha, sack cloths are used by the characters, to depict the ancient time. When the scene changes to the present, the costumes reflect modern day rural background and fashion, especially as reflected in the fashion of the women wailing over the harvest of death in the community. In the palace, royalty and affluence are reflected in the costumes of the king and the chiefs. This contrasts with the sack cloths in Umuoka, when the journey to the hills of Amadioha takes place. Specifically, sack cloths are worn generally, with women wearing *jigida* (waste beads); the men compliment the sack cloths with arm bands made of palm fronds. The dead are also covered with plantain leaves in the ancient story. The acolyte (Gentle Jack) also wears sack cloth, cowries, and little calabashes as head and arm bands, leg rattles, and ankle bands. The Igwe (Amaechi Muonagor) wears modern chieftaincy regalia, with beads around the neck and wrist, crown, staff of office, and horse tail, among others. The chiefs wear modern dresses, red caps or native caps, red beads, and hand fans. Among the Ibo, the red cap is a symbol of the status of high attainment, an indication that the wearer is a titled chief. Incidentally, most of the chiefs tie wrappers; but one of

them wears trousers, showing that modernity has set in. Somehow, the palace of the old Igwe (Joe Layode) looks more archaic. Furthermore, while the new Igwe wears animal skin and cowries, among others, the old Igwe wears leopard skin, a basket woven crown, red beads, and so on. The old dibia (Pete Edochie) wears animal skin on his head and on his back, among other accessories. On the other hand, the young dibia (Charles Ukpang) wears bands made of cowries and cloth around the arms, neck and head; he wears a feather on his head, beads around the neck, and has native chalk marks around his right eye, as well as two stripes on the hands, near the shoulder. He also ties red and white cloth around his waist, and holds a hand staff made of brush-like material.

There is no gainsaying the fact that a high level of contrast is evident in the film. The people in sack-cloths indicate that they belong to the ancient story; but in contrast, the zinc roof and the brick houses have been used to indicate that there has been an incursion of a different level of civilisation. In the ancient story, the people live in mud huts. In the modern story, the front of the king's palace vividly portrays a much more advanced culture because the house is built with bricks, indicating that cement had been imported from a much more developed culture. The aluminium zinc roof and the cement block walls are seen from a pull back of the camera to show that there is transformation.

Music and sound effects in the film enhance the mood of the film. For example, music is used to establish tension; emotions are communicated, and the action is commented on by the music. Also, the music sets the context for the next action; provides transition to the next scene; or signals the end of scenes. This underscores the fact that music can be very powerful in shaping the form of any film. The rhythm of the music is used to dictate the rhythm of the cuts at some points, such as the way the drum controls the cuts in fight sequences. Incidentally, silence, which has its serious dramatic effect, is also used to create tension. For instance, thunder and lightning effects are used at various points in the film. The film opens with a long shot of the skyline, followed by thunder and lightning,

apparently to herald an important event – the birth of a baby boy, who is dedicated to Amadioha, the god of thunder. Furthermore, there are dirges or flute music at various points to enhance the mourning mood, namely, when there are deaths in the kingdom, both in the modern story and in the flashback sequences when Ihekumere is being led to be buried alive; and in the last sequence in the ancient story when the people weep over the loss of the six men who embarked on the journey, to mention a few. There are also other sound effects, which heighten the mood at various points in the journey, especially with the various dangers they face; or when they are about to be attacked by evil forces. The killing of little Ihekumere's parents, the chase sequence that follows, the purification of the seven for the journey, and various points in the journey are all reinforced with background sound effects to heighten tension. The dominant mood determines the tempo of the sound effects and the way they are pitched. The use of modern songs is also a symbolic representation of the fact that this is not a moonlight tale. This is a modern story being told in a new format. It is like bringing it suddenly into the consciousness of the viewer that this is a modern tale being told in a new medium, the video film medium. It is a tale that foregrounds the moral of the consequences of sacrificing innocent blood for whatever reasons, whether it is out of envy or for nefarious causes.

It is also necessary for us to link our analysis to the various levels of the epic, or the structure of the epic. Here, one is talking about the landscape the young men travel through, on the perilous journey of self-discovery. These things cannot be analysed without relating them to the Osun Osogbo shrine because that is one of the locations where the film was shot. The works of Susan Wenger feature prominently in the quest. The statues, the grooves, and water rivulets, are all landmarks of the Osun Osogbo shrine. Also, the Ogbunike Cave provides the location for the groove of Amadioha, where the knife is eventually retrieved. This sequence is representative of the Arochukwu Long Juju, which was an important source for acquisition of slaves by slave traders in those days. There are also locations around the Olumo Rock of Abeokuta, which

provide the rocky scenario for the quest.

The overall editing of *Igodo* is quite fluid and tight, in the sense that there are no dull moments in the film. As opposed to current developments where filmmakers capitalise on the sequel syndrome, as a commercial formula, the treatment of *Igodo* is such that the first half of the story (Disc **A**) sets the situation for the beginning of the quest. Subsequently, one is taken through the main journey in Disc **B**. The smooth and rhythmic flow of the shots keeps the viewer spellbound throughout the **104** minutes duration of the film.

In the final analysis, *Igodo* makes the point that there is need for somebody (possibly an artist, who is a raconteur of societal values) to tell the story to younger generations, and to provide a moral lesson for the modern generation. There is need for selfless leadership; there is need for people of conscience in the society; and also, there is the need for retention of memory. The film seems to argue that if nobody of artistic status in the mould of Igodo was available to document the past happenings in the community, it would not have been possible for the moral lesson to be handed down to the society. It is pertinent to recall that Igodo had told the Igwe in council that if there are recurrent deaths in the community, then it was because the people had sinned again. As earlier noted, the original sin, as it were, was taking the life of an innocent young boy, who was rescued from the top of a tree. The film ends with children climbing on top of trees to have a better view, to take them from the murkiness of contemporary society. When one is at a higher level, one sees farther than the people that are standing on the ground. It is as if the children are telling us to look farther beyond our horizon. In other words, people who sacrifice other people to make money do not consider the future. They are more concerned with the immediate present and they do not use their heads. They are not creative enough to create wealth from nothingness; rather, they sacrifice human beings as instruments for inducing wealth.

3.8 A Critical Reading of *Egg of Life*

The second work that is examined in this chapter is *Egg of Life*, a two-part film. The point has been made that this film is a quick economic response in the industry to *Igodo*, as if to display gender sensitivity. This is in the sense that it is more of a feminine version of *Igodo*, apparently in pursuance of the need to portray women as heroines, capable of saving the community in times of need. Interestingly, the film is also from the stable of OJ Productions. Again, the film is directed by Andy Amenechi, who co-directed *Igodo* with Obaseki; and the screenplay is by Kabat Esosa Egbon, who co-scripted *Igodo* with Obaseki. Furthermore, the film establishes OJ Productions as a production outfit that has made immense contributions towards giving the epic and historical genre a pride of place in the annals of film history in Nigeria.

Egg of Life is a story revolving around the metaphysics of the ogbanje child in Iboland. Basically, an ogbanje is a child who had entered into some kind of allegiance with his spirit mates before coming into the world, to be born into a family. Somehow, ogbanje children are supposed to go back after a time to reunite with their spirit mates. Here, one can easily recollect similar texts in terms of the inter-textuality that is suggested by the narrative of *Egg of Life*. There will be need to return to this point later in the analysis.

In the film, the royal house in the kingdom of Umuagu is for many years without an heir to the throne because the Queen, Lolo (Ebele Okaro-Onyuike), has not given the Igwe (Pete Edochie) a child. The sorrow of the royal household is turned to joy when Lolo becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby boy. The Igwe calls for celebration since the “birth of royalty is always heralded by the gods.” The Priestess of Efuru (Clarion Chukwura-Abiola) blesses the baby; and the Igwe also prophesies that he is destined to be great. Shortly after the earthly celebration, there is also celebration in the land of the unborn as Ikemefuna (Ifeanyi Ezeokeke), the heir to the throne, plays with spirit children in the world of the unborn, while he is sleeping. His mother tries to wake him up; but he looks as if he is dead. There is panic but when he wakes up, he wears a wicked smile,

behaving as if nothing had happened. This is followed by bizarre incidents of Ikemefuna playing or eating with the spirit children whom nobody sees. The maid (Frances Nsonwu) is worried and concludes that something has to be done before it is too late.

Eight years later, the spirit children tell Ikemefuna (now played by Williams Uchemba) that his time on earth is up and that it is time for him to join them. Ikemefuna pleads for more time, insisting that he is not ready to die yet; but the spirit children are persistent as they come for him even in the day time. Somehow, this is noticed by his mother and the maid. Their neighbour, who appears to know more about such supernatural happenings, tells them that Ikemefuna may well be an *ogbanje*. Unfortunately, this revelation does not go down well with the *Igwe*. The woman who had the temerity to insinuate that Ikemefuna could be an *ogbanje* is banished from the community. To the *Igwe*, it was an insult on the royal family; it is a sacrilege that had to be dealt with squarely.

In another sequence, Ikemefuna has an encounter with the spirit children, hallucinates and falls into a coma, thus bringing sorrow to the royal household. The *Igwe* feels the gods are being unkind to him, and laments the legacy he would leave for posterity. However, the Priestess of *Efuru* comes in to proffer solution to the problem, disclosing that Ikemefuna is not the *Igwe*'s son and that he is an *ogbanje* who does not have much time on earth. According to the Priestess, the spirit that inhabits the ocean is shrouded in mystery; and that the oath that the spirit children take cannot be broken. The solution to the problem is that the life force with his kindred spirit has to be brought back and that it is a dangerous journey. The seven maidens selected for the journey are Buchi (Georgina Onuoha), Omalechi (Nkiru Sylvanus), Nkem (Padita Agu), Amaka (Sabina Mole), Chioma (Ihuoma Nnadi), Isioma (Funke Akindele), and Segbello (Gazza Anderson). As they prepare for the journey, all parents and guardians encourage their daughters; but Oma's uncle chides her instead:

UNCLE: Omalechi, so you were chosen for the journey too? When I told you, you were a cursed child, you didn't believe me. Now look at you! Chosen to go and

die in the land of the dead! ... It is better for you to die
in the evil forest than for me to soil my hands on you;
because I know that one day, I might just kill you in
anger.

One of the maidens, Nkem, is afraid of taking part in the journey; and it takes the old widow to encourage Oma to realise that it is a great honour to fight for one's fatherland. On the other hand, Buchi's father (Major Okolo) is more emotional and sympathetic to the cause, when he bids his daughter farewell. The Priestess sanctifies them for the journey in the shrine. There is unease among the maidens; more worrisome is the fact that they have seven days to accomplish the journey or Ikem would die. They are told that it is a journey where they will come across obstacles both in the forest and in the land of a thousand demons. The injunction is that they should follow their hearts, knowing that what the heart feels is more than whatever the eyes can ever see. Eventually, the girls are taken to the stream, the waters of Efuru, for the final preparations before being taken to the palace, where the Igwe gives them a farewell message:

IGWE: My heart is heavy, so are the hearts of your parents ...
From your parents, I demand understanding and patience
for the sacrifice you are about to make. From this
moment on, you are all heroines in this land. The entire
destiny of this community rests squarely on you. Should
any of you come back here with the egg of life and you
restore life to my son, you will not only be a royal bride,
but in addition, you will be entitled to a large chunk of
the wealth of this community.

They eventually leave the palace to embark on the journey, but not without a warning from the Priestess:

PRIESTESS: Whatever ill befalls the prince spells doom
in the land. Yours is a difficult task; a task that has
never been embarked upon for centuries. But I know
that Efuru ... she will protect you; she will guide you,
just as the mother hen protects her chicks ... some of
you might never see this land again!

In the course of the journey, the girls encounter many obstacles and five of them die on the way. When Buchi and Oma, the surviving two, finally succeed in taking the egg of life, some spirit-children appear and confront them. They run out and are faced with the challenge of returning to the village with the egg. They restate the fact that they need courage, which explains why Buchi says the “egg is our destiny and the destiny of the land.” Unfortunately, on their way back, Buchi is fatally wounded when they are attacked by some savages. In spite of all the odds, they get back to the village and Buchi hands over the egg of life to the priestess before collapsing. In her death throes, she manages to send word to her father, saying that she has made him proud by fulfilling her promise. Eventually, the priestess restores life to Ikem with the egg of life and the Igwe fulfils his promise by betrothing Oma to Ikemefuna. He also promises to immortalise the seven maidens by naming the seven quarters of the community after them.

In terms of thematic emphasis, the film explores the *ogbanje* myth in traditional African society. It has been observed that an *ogbanje*, in traditional African society, is a child that is destined to die. Soyinka and Clark have graphically portrayed this phenomenon in their poems, “The Reign of Abiku” and “Abiku,” respectively, which is the term the Yoruba call such children. In the film, Ikemefuna is portrayed as an *ogbanje*, who had taken an oath in the world of the unborn, as to when he would return. Unknown to his parents, his time is up and his friends want him back, against his will. It is his unwillingness to join them that throws the royal household into grief as he falls into a coma. For him to regain consciousness, his “life force,” which is what the egg of life represents, must be brought.

From the above, it can be surmised that as an epic, *Egg of Life* examines the African world-view as espoused by Soyinka in *Myth, Literature and the African World View*. Put succinctly, the African believes in three realms of existence: the world of the living, the world of the dead and the spirit beings, and the world of the unborn. It is believed that the interplay of these three worlds determines the daily existence of man. While modern religious practices emphasise the authority of the

Supreme Being (God) in the control of the spiritual realm and have thus reduced the influence of the gods and ancestors, the existence of this world and its place in the affairs of men is acknowledged secretly by most Africans. This explains why many people in leadership positions hold the *Holy Bible* on one hand to go to church on Sundays, only to secretly visit spiritualists the remaining days of the week.

On another level, *Egg of Life* portrays the eagerness of the royalty in traditional African societies to have a worthy successor. The Igwe is childless and he could not bear the agony of living without an heir to the throne. It is thus a thing of joy when his wife becomes pregnant and bears him a male child. The Igwe's joy is however short-lived as the boy's behaviour soon becomes suspect and a neighbour opines that he may be an ogbanje. Angered by such effrontery, the Igwe banishes her without hesitation.

The film also examines the essence of collective sacrifice, suggesting that women could play very vital role in saving their society. In other words, the film posits that women could be heroines, capable of being remembered by posterity for sacrificing their lives for the wellbeing of their community. It is instructive that while there are young men in the community, the gods decree that the egg of life can only to be brought by seven virgins. In the end, while the community mourns the death of six of the girls, it is realised that the sacrifice is not in vain, as the life force is brought back and Ikemefuna is revived. In other words, the seven girls are called to sacrifice their lives to ensure continuity in the kingdom.

On yet another level, the film looks at the attitude of foster parents to orphans. Oma (Nkiru Sylvanus) is an orphan, who craves for parental love and care. Fortunately, she finds this in the old widow, who is branded a witch in the community. It is an irony that Oma's uncle sees her as a big liability to him and his family; but in the end, she is the one that brings the egg of life to save the life of the prince and indeed the community. Thus, she becomes the spouse of the heir to the throne, which apparently changes her fortunes in life. Though it is not suggested in the film, it is probable that her cantankerous uncle

would in fact go and embrace her, professing that he had always been proud of her exploits in life. This is understandable, more so, because in life, everybody wants to identify with success in whatever form it comes.

Finally, the film examines the question of leadership. Buchi (Georgina Onuoha) is chosen to lead the group but somehow, her leadership role is questioned. To Oma (Nkiru Sylvanus), Buchi is insensitive to the plight of others, especially Nkem (Padita Agu), who gets tired, hungry and needs some rest. The underlying factor as to the acceptability or otherwise of the leadership of Buchi is that she is not elected by members of the group. In other words, the others feel she is foisted on the group; her choice as the leader is not through democratic process. The lesson here is that if everyone forgets about his/her ego in a group and unite, group aims and objectives would be easily achieved. The girls realise that the mission and destiny of the land are paramount; and that the task ahead is greater than any of them.

The film is presented from the perspective of an African moonlight tale. As it is the tradition, children are gathered for a night of entertainment, and they entreat an old man to tell them a story. The old man, who eventually assumes the role of the narrator, tells the children a story, which according to him, dates back to “the times of our great-grandfathers, a time when men were men, and when men were recognised by their deeds and actions.” This tale, retold in the context of a traditional African setting in Iboland, takes the children back to the old kingdom of Umuagu and the royal house of Ebubechi (Pete Edochie), where the king has some kind of delay in producing an heir to the throne. The birth of Ikemefuna comes at a time when he (the Igwe) is almost giving up, and the birth itself is heralded by the Priestess of Efuru (Clarion Chukwura-Abiola), who foretells that the kingdom and his (the child’s) reign are going to be blessed. Somewhere along the line, because of the allegiance which Ikemefuna had entered into with his spirit mates, he is called back; and that is where the crisis sets in.

Significantly, at the end of the journey, the girls succeed in bringing back the “egg of life.” Just like the perils which the

men in *Igodo* undergo when they go in search of the knife, the girls also suffer all kinds of perils. Coincidentally, most of the girls die in the course of the quest because of foolhardiness. They had been advised to heed the voice of reason but most of them did not obey this injunction to the letter. Precisely, they had been told, from the onset, not to look back; or not to help each other. The reality is that they did not heed these warnings. As a result, Chioma (Ihuoma Nnadi) is taken by *ebube*, the evil whirlwind, because she allows fear to overtake her and screams, thus allowing the protective leaf in her lips to fall down. Secondly, due to fear, Amaka (Sabina Mole) drowns as they are crossing a stream. Thirdly, at the river of death, where they are not supposed to look into the water or turn back, Isioma (Funke Akindele) looks into the river, falls into it and drowns. Fourthly, on a bush path, they see a little boy (a spirit child), who says he is hungry and begs them to give him food. Ello (Gazza Anderson) ignores the injunction and goes to meet the boy; the spirit child turns into a monster and kills her. Fifthly, they encounter dead bodies coming out of graves; one of the caskets opens and the apparition of Chioma beckons to them and Nkem foolishly goes to her, and she is killed. One argument here is that these are cases of foolhardiness which people could learn from and listen to the voice of reason.

In the final analysis, the consolation is that the girls succeed in bringing the egg back to prolong the life of the prince, Ikemefuna (Williams Uchemba). As a reward, of course, Oma, the orphan who survives the whole epic journey, is made to marry the prince, as promised by the Igwe. In fact, that is not the point that is of major interest here. What is of interest is that, there are lots of symbolic elements in the quest for the egg of life. The maidens eventually sacrifice their lives for the life of the prince, who is like a cord linking the ancestral world of the community. This is informed by the fact that the ancestral cord can only be sustained by the life of the prince because for the king to die without an heir, is to leave the community without a leader, the kind of leadership which is preservative of the moral fabric of that community. That is why the Igwe promises that whoever comes back with the egg will have a share in the leadership of

the community. It is no longer going to be a male-dominated leadership, but an equal share between the king and the queen. It is like giving hope to the feminine gender as prospective leaders of tomorrow.

The king symbolises the authority and spiritual wellbeing of the community. So, the girls see it as self-sacrifice intended to bring about equilibrium and the continuity of the peace and harmony in the community. That is why the king tells the prince that the royal throne is a sacred one; and that whoever sits there is not himself, since he is divinely placed there to rule on behalf of the community. It is believed that whatever he utters while on the throne is pronounced by the gods. Furthermore, whoever occupies the throne is doing so on behalf of the gods of the land. That is how the maidens also perceive the quest: they believe that they are making the sacrifice, not for the king *per se*, but for the entire community because the king symbolises the spiritual godhead of the community. Little wonder then that the Igwe says that as the throne is sacred, whoever abuses the throne is abusing the sacredness of the community, not the person occupying the throne.

There is also the fact of the symbolism of the egg itself. It is common knowledge that an egg is a very fragile object, which needs protection. This is because if it falls down, it breaks and spills its content. In other words, if we do not handle an egg with care, it breaks; and when it breaks, the yoke spills out; and when the yoke spills out, life is lost. This explains why after getting the egg from the sacred groove, Buchi and Oma are concerned as to how they would get it back to the village to revive the prince. To encourage themselves, they say that it is, "forward ever; backward never!" The fact also remains that life itself is comparable to an egg. It is much more so if that life belongs to the royal house. That is why in the bid for the community to save the life of a royal blood, the lives of six maidens are sacrificed.

In the area of characterisation, apart from the Igwe himself, the other male characters hardly deserve any serious analysis. The Igwe is a man who is desirous of an heir to the throne. Thus, his happiness knows no bounds when the queen delivers

a son. He orders that all the palm wine tappers should bring all their wine to the palace, saying that the birth of a royal son calls for celebrations. The Igwe is a very strict person who does not condone any intransigence. For daring to call Ikem an ogbanje, he banishes Obiageli, Lolo's friend. He tells the prince that the throne is sacred; and anyone who insults his heir, insults the throne. Nevertheless, the Igwe is also human, in the sense that he becomes helpless in the face of danger. When Ikem collapses and the Priestess of Efuru pushes it down his throat, as it were, that Ikem is an ogbanje, he becomes speechless. He realises that the gods had been unfair to him by giving him an ogbanje for an heir. In the sequence where the maidens go for the quest, he is seen as a leader torn between the devil and the deep blue sea, so to speak; his emotions are torn between the sacrifice of the seven maidens and the life of the prince which is hanging on a balance. When the egg is eventually brought back, he is also sorrowful because of the anguish that parents go through over the loss of their loved ones.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the female characters, especially, the Priestess, Buchi, Oma, Nkem, and probably Lolo, need special attention in the area of characterisation. In the first place, the Priestess of Efuru (Clarion Chukwura-Abiola) is the symbol of hope of the community, in the sense that she gives a sense of direction to the Igwe and the community. In the sequence where the child is born, she prophesies that the boy is going to be great, and that his reign would be memorable. This is exactly what happens in the course of the story, as a serious sacrifice is demanded of the community to save his life. The priestess is very blunt and tells the Igwe that Ikem is an ogbanje, and that he does not have much time to live, except the life-force is brought to save his life. Apart from being a spirit medium, she is a teacher who prepares the seven maidens for the quest.

Buchi (Georgina Onuoha) is the leader of the team, who right from the beginning displays exceptional courage. She promises her father that she will make him proud by coming back. She is a disciplined and courageous leader, who does not give room for dissenting views. She expects obedience from all, being the leader of the group. She also believes that a leader has

to be accepted, whether he/she is chosen or duly elected. In other words, it is the performance of the leader that is paramount in the aspirations of a group. Buchi is very brave and encourages the team throughout the quest. She is also very realistic and knows that the fatal wound she sustained in the encounter with the savages will stop her from delivering the egg of life. Consequently, she hands over the egg to Oma, which symbolises the formal hand over of leadership and authority. It also parodies, to a large extent, the unwillingness of African leaders to hand over power, even when they are past their prime. Put succinctly, the propensity for contemporary African leaders to perpetuate themselves in office for life is one of the banes of leadership in the African continent. In death, Buchi feels a sense of fulfilment, in that she hands over the egg to Oma, a worthy successor. She is also happy to have made her father proud, though she does not live to reap the fruits of her labour. Pathetically, the only promise from the Igwe is that quarters in the community would be named after the maidens who sacrificed their lives.

Oma (Nkiru Sylvanus), the homely and domesticated village girl, is an orphan who is despised by her uncle. She is humane and tender-hearted, and helps the old widow, whom she sees as a mother-figure. She is very loving and understanding, which explains why she sympathises with Nkem when the latter complains of being hungry and tired. She has a very strong personality, and stands up to Buchi when she (Buchi) drives them too hard. She challenges Buchi, basically because her choice as the leader was not at the instance of the team. In other words, she sees the leadership of Buchi as an imposition on the group because it was not through due democratic process. Oma also serves as a check on the excesses of the leadership style of Buchi in the film. Subsequently, she mourns the death of Buchi, whom she had come to admire in the course of the quest. Though she is betrothed to the prince, and she is to inherit a large chunk of the wealth of the royal house, in line with the Igwe's decree, she is not happy because she sees the whole thing as a pyrrhic victory.

Nkem (Padita Agu), on the other hand, is more or less the crying baby of the group. She is represented as being always

fearful, and as somebody who never hides her feelings. She tells her father that she does not want to die; and when the old man encourages her, she is unsuccessful in her attempts at showing that she has conquered that fear. It can be said that Nkem is a reflection of the flipside of the female gender. She is always scared and feels hungry regularly. She causes most of the quarrels between Buchi and Oma, as she complains of being hungry and tired. In one of the sequences, when only three of them are left, she starts complaining, thus drawing the ire of Buchi. Somehow, she is the one that ends up arbitrating between Buchi and Oma, reminding them of the essence of unity. Predictably, she does not make it back because she does not heed the advice of the Priestess that they should always trust their hearts.

Lolo (Ebele Okaro-Onyuike) is the queen who has been barren for many years. It is common knowledge that barrenness is something that is taken seriously in African society, because it is believed that procreation is the major reason why a man marries a woman. If a woman does not give her man a child on time, there is likely to be expressions of concern by his relations. Where this condition is prolonged, the woman could be sent packing; or the husband could be compelled by his family members to marry other wives to procreate. It is thus a thing of joy that Lolo gets pregnant and gives the king, not only a child, but an heir. Unfortunately, the joy of the royal household is shattered by the abnormal behaviour of Ikemefuna. Incidentally, Lolo is not knowledgeable about the ogbanje myth, probably because Ikemefuna is her first and only child. It is not surprising then that she does not see anything wrong with the behaviour of the boy at first, even when the maid complains about it. She is a loving and doting mother, especially as Ikemefuna is an only son; and becomes worried when she discovers the strange behaviour of the boy. She is unhappy that Obiageli, her friend, is banished by the Igwe for having the effrontery to call Ikemefuna an ogbanje; but she is helpless as the word of the Igwe is law in the community. She attempts to intercede for Obiageli by pleading with the Igwe for forgiveness. Evidently, she is a docile and obedient woman, and does not want to

counter the orders of the king. When Ikemefuna falls into a coma, she is heartbroken as she sees her entire world falling into pieces.

As a gendered story, it is necessary for us to briefly highlight the portrayal of the role of women as leaders in society. The Priestess of Efuru is the person around whom the whole story is anchored. Apart from anchoring the narrative action, as a storyteller of some sort, she is a leader and a vital source of inspiration in the community. For instance, in the early sequences in the film, we see the Igwe as an arrogant king; but by the second half of the film, he is totally broken, looking towards the Priestess for inspiration. Here is a man who banishes a woman for having the effrontery to call the heir to the throne an ogbanje; and he asks his wife to keep quiet and not plead on behalf of her friend. When the Priestess calls his son, "that thing," and that he is an ogbanje, the Igwe is helpless. By the second half of the film, he is totally finished as his confidence is totally drained. The implication here is that the leadership position has shifted from the Igwe to the Priestess of Efuru as everybody now looks upon her to safeguard the life of the community. It is not necessarily the life of the young man that is at stake; rather, it is the life of the community because the boy is the symbolism of the continuity of that community. So, if the film is looked at from that perspective, it can be argued that it is on the shoulder of the Priestess of Efuru that the survival of the community lies.

From the foregoing, there is need to also look at the various kinds of personalities reflected in the seven maidens. For instance, when one of the girls says that, "I do not even know why the priestess chose me," the other responds that, "It is because I know how to cook." The responses that follow reveal the individuality of each of the maidens. They all have their good points, and their weak points; and they are supposed to serve as helpers to each other. They are also supposed to help and encourage each other, thus serving as moral anchors for the story itself. This underpins the view that it is the weaknesses in each of their personalities that make them to be susceptible to temptation. The weaknesses in each of them also make them not to survive the perilous trip. It can be recalled that it is

temptation that makes one of the girls to sing and dance with the female spirits. She is so carried away by the action and she would have gone if not that she is yanked back by Oma. Furthermore, even after they have convinced Oma that the child of the forest is a demon, Chioma runs back to comfort the boy; and of course, the boy turns out to be a monster, pretending to be hungry, helpless, and lost in the forest. In looking at the moral weaknesses of each of these characters, one realises that they are meant to serve as moral lessons. In other words, there is need for people to continuously question themselves, thus: What kind of lessons can we learn from these moral weaknesses, which make six people not to survive the story? What kind of strength have we gained from the characters of Buchi and Oma? For example, Buchi tells her father (Major Okolo): "I am going ... and I am going to come back." This is self-conviction, which is an essential for one who is in a leadership position. This is to say that in whatever we do, we must be convinced that we will be able to accomplish something; and that self-conviction sees people through. Sadly enough, she (Buchi) is fatally injured and dies. However, before she dies, she sends word to her father, saying, "Tell my father ... I made him proud ... I fulfilled my promise ... I came back." There is no gainsaying the fact that every person that aspires to a leadership position needs self-conviction and determination to accomplish whatever vision he/she has for his/her community.

At this juncture, it is necessary to come back to the symbolic element of the ogbanje as portrayed in the film. The issue to examine here is the ogbanje myth. Who is an ogbanje (or abiku) in the real sense? What makes an ogbanje want to die and be reborn several times? What role do they serve in African society? These are mysteries that African scientists are yet to solve. Some children die and are born as grandfathers; and so, there are names, such as, Babawale, Babatunde, Babajide, and so on, among the Yoruba. There have also been cases of parents giving birth to children that die up to three or four times. In one of such cases, when the child (a boy) died for the third time, sympathisers cut big marks on his face with a blade. This was informed by the belief that if such a child comes back again, he

will not die again. True to that belief, when the woman gave birth again, the baby boy had all the scars that they had put on the last boy. They called him, *Waibodo*, meaning in Izon, “he has come back” and the boy stayed this time around. This is an aspect that needs to be reflected on because it is an aspect of our existence that requires philosophical enquiry, in terms of African belief systems.

Africans believe that once a person dies, he goes to rest for a while and comes back again, either to the same family or to another family. It is an intermittent movement which is anchored on the concept of predestination. In Izon traditional belief system, it is called *Bi bobra* (what you ask for). In Urhobo cosmology, it is *otacha* – you say what you want to be in this world and whatever you say, nobody can change it. For instance, in the film, *Egg of Life*, the spirit children say, “I want to be born; then I will come back and go back again ...” To them, it is a game; but the truth is that parents that bear such children go through serious pains. Thus, it is necessary to look at the phenomenon, not just at the level of dying and coming back, but in the context of African belief system. It has been noted that Africans believe in the concept of predestination because in the spirit realm, a child determines how he/she wants to live before being born into this world. It is also believed that predestination can be changed. As Achebe philosophically put it, “if a man says yes, his *chi* cannot say no,” and that is what the story says.

There is also the need to look at symbolic elements of colour. The focus here is the wrong chroma keying of colours on the scenery during the quest. One is concerned about symbolic elements of colour because in traditional African society, red and white colours are of symbolic importance. They are like the opposite sides of the same coin. Red symbolises danger; it links the world of the living and the ancestral world; and it is mostly used by priests and priestesses as part of their paraphernalia. The paraphernalia of the Igwe changes as the quest is about to begin. At the beginning, he uses almost white; later it turns to a red wrapper, tied round his shoulder. The Igwe’s cap also becomes a beaded red cap. Symbolically, all the maidens

are attired in pure white, symbolising their purity; they are all supposed to be virgins, which implies that they are all pure and innocent. It is that purity of the community which is sacrificed in order for it to regain the life of the prince. The point has also been made that the prince also encompasses the continuity of the lineage and the community.

The camera work in the film aligns with the soap opera convention, which is TV-oriented, as noted by Shaka (2004, pp.11-30). This is quite understandable because, as noted earlier, most of the directors crossed over from the television medium. Consequently, their directorial approaches are inclined towards the TV screen, and not the big screen. For example, after the death of Ello (Gazza Anderson) in the stream, the camera zooms to the stream; it cuts to the girls as they start moving on. Shortly, the girls stop to ponder on their plight in the forest, saying, “Are we all going to die like this?”

There seems to be a surfeit of music in the film; and most of it is not tied to mood and atmosphere. The flute music and some of the dirges composed specially for the film are very melodious and worthy of commendation. The dirge, *Oyim, ebe ki no? Bia; nwannem, ebe ki no? Bia* (meaning, “My friend, where are you? Come, my sister, where are you? Come), which is used at various points, especially after the death of Chioma (Ihuoma Nnadi), is quite sorrowful. Unfortunately, this contrasts with the poor rendition of the same dirge by the girls at that point. This apparently reflects the hasty nature of the production context in the industry. A more professional approach would have been for a musicologist to handle the songs, still using the same artists to render them sonorously, or simply “ghosting” them. Ghosting is a process whereby the actor just mouths the song, while the actual sound is laid at the background through automatic or automated dialogue replacement (ADR) method.

Special visual effects are also used profusely in *Egg of Life*. The reason for this has been stated earlier in the analyses of the trends; that since the industry is privately driven by economic considerations, the guiding principle is financial gains. If something has been done in a film, you attempt to do that thing, and try to surpass it if possible. With the special effects that had

been deployed in *Igodo*, there were high expectations from the viewers and the marketers. It should also be noted here that some of the special effects are repeated intermittently to give symbolic meaning to them. For instance, every time the spirit children meet, the strobe and mix effects are used to create an eerie atmosphere. Furthermore, there are chroma key effects, which vacillate between red and black, distorting the skyline, their bodies, and waters. There are also shaky, swift camera movements and the whirling effects (used to kill), which are deployed at various points presumably to heighten the dramatic effects. Like in *Igodo*, the quick and shaky camera movements on trees appear to reflect their state of mind. It shows that they are afraid and are unsure of the realisation of their mission.

However, the editing of the film is not as tight as *Igodo*. The deficiency can be attributed to the two-part syndrome in the industry, which had become the norm as at the time it was produced. The practice of elasticising films that would have been otherwise one-offs is a development that has created serious concern in Nollywood. Specifically, the first part of the film presents the background and preparations for the journey while the second part takes us tortuously through the journey. It is instructive that approaches like this necessitated the National Film and Video Censors Board to warn producers in 2006 to be cautious with the parts syndrome. In the same vein, organisers of the Africa Movies Academy Awards (AMAA) advised that for the 2007 Awards, only Directors' Cuts were to be accepted for films which were in parts. For example, *Egg of Life* opens with the beginning of a moonlight tale session. When the narrator tells the children that he will take the children to the Kingdom of Umuagu and the royal house of Ebubechi, the camera zooms gradually to a medium close up (MCU) of the storyteller, followed by another MCU of him, and starts fading just as the camera tilts up to the branches of the tree under which he is sitting. After the shot fades to black, it fades in again to branches of palm trees (as if to balance the previous shot), and tilts down to the royal house (again as if to create another complimentary camera movement), where the Igwe is pacing about in anxiety over the wife's cries over her labour pains.

Ironically, due to the commercially-oriented editing of the film, to the whims and caprices of the EP, the film was elasticised to two parts, though it could have been in one part. For instance, in Part 1, out of the running time of 1hr 00min 54secs of Disc A, as much as 7mins were used for trailers (promos). Added to 42mins 17secs of Disc B, the duration of Part 1 comes up to 96mins 11secs. The situation is more worrisome in Part 2 because out of a running time of 1hr 1sec 10 frames of Disc A, a whopping 22mins 33secs of precious viewing time was used for trailers. This means that what passes for Disc A is just 37mins 28secs. If this is added to the running time of Disc B, which is 44mins 25secs, the duration of this part is just about 81mins 53secs. This is a practice that cannot be justified in all its ramifications. Invariably, it falls far below the standard movie running time of about 105mins.

In concluding, one observes that *Egg of Life* takes the form of a folk tale, in the mode of *Tales by Moonlight*, a format that had been made popular by Nigerian Television Authority. In the television series, it is a woman that narrates the stories as a presenter. In the film, an old man tells children the story. On the other hand, it is told under a tree in the village. Evidently, it is a film woven around African cosmology. It portrays a situation where people determine how they want to live in this world, and how that affects the destiny of the people that they interact with. The question is whether this becomes a source of happiness, sorrow and tears to the families through which they come into this world.

3.9 A Comparative Analysis of *Igodo* and *Egg of Life*

At this point, it is pertinent to undertake a brief comparative analysis of *Igodo* and *Egg of Life*. In *Igodo*, the quest is an all-male affair, while in *Egg of Life*, it is an all-female affair. Whereas *Igodo* is essentially a male-oriented story, *Egg of Life* is a female gender-related story in the sense that the Priestess of Efuru, the most powerful person in the story, is a lady. Efuru is also represented as the goddess that protects the community. Though the quest in *Egg of Life* is female-oriented, the girls go through the same terrain; and Egbuna and Buchi all give the same type

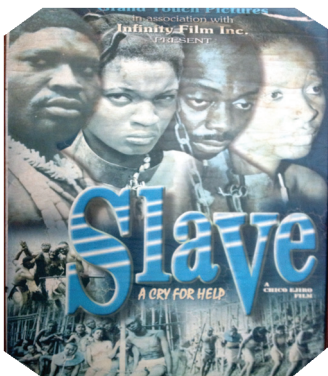
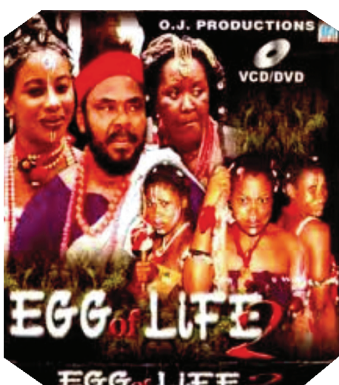
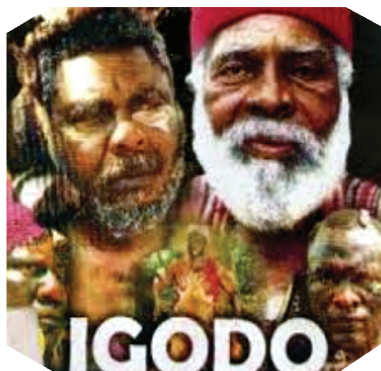
of leadership: an exemplary sacrificial leadership. Furthermore, they go through and face all the challenges of the epic story – crossing terrains, facing dangers, covering distances, and going to the land of the dead to retrieve the symbolic knife and egg of life, respectively.

It is also interesting to note that the mystical number of “7” in African philosophy is replicated in both films. The seven maidens, who go in search of the egg of life in the film, *Egg of Life*, equate with the seven young men in *Igodo* that went in search of the knife. However, rather than go for an instrument of warfare, as seen in *Igodo*, the women in *Egg of Life* go in search of an instrument of life. It is understandable because women, from their biological make-up, bring forth life. In both works, seven young men and girls embark on the quests but only one survives in the end. In *Egg of Life*, Buchi pays the supreme price, just like Egbuna does in *Igodo*.

Predictably, the use of costumes and application of make-up in *Egg of Life* are not much different from what is seen in *Igodo*. There is an attempt at portraying the epic in the design of the character’s costumes and make-up. It is worth reiterating that in costume design, the choice of colours symbolises different things and serves different purposes: the status of the character, the dominant mood, the time of day, and so on. The costumes used thus vacillate between the ancient and the modern. For instance, the Igwe in *Egg of Life* wears animal skin, akwete, keinte, and coloured cotton cloths. Incidentally, his use of colours is not very well defined – he uses purple, yellow, green, white, and so on, which does not convey much symbolic character trait, perhaps apart from purple, which in conventional theatre practice, symbolises royalty. Somehow, there are points where modern plain George wrappers are used by the characters; at other points, akwete cloths are used, especially by the palace guards, messengers and villagers. When the town crier is summoning all the maidens to the village square for example, there are two or three persons who come into shot, tying plain George wrappers.

3.10 Summary

In this part, a critical study of the epic and historical genre in Nollywood was examined. It encompassed a background study of the nature of history, sources of history, the essence of objectivity in historical analysis, the use of oral tradition in the reconstruction of a people's history, and film as history. It subsequently proceeded to examine the nature of the epic film. An important aspect that was looked into was the dynamics of historical reconstruction through epics, highlighting the 12 stages of Vogler's hero's journey. Finally, from a brief survey of the development of the epic genre in Nollywood, there was a critical reading of *Igodo* and *Egg of Life*, taking into consideration the narrative techniques deployed by the directors in both films.





Amaechi Muonagor –
Igwe in *Igodo*



Sam Dede –
Egbuna in *Igodo*



Norbert Young -
Igodo in the film, *Igodo*



Andy Amenechi -
Director of *Igodo*/*Egg of Life*



Pete Edochie – Old Dibia in *Igodo*



Egg of Life



Egg of Life



Georgina Onuoha -
Buchi in the film, *Egg of Life*



Clarion Chukwurah –
Priestess of Efuru in *Egg of Life*



Pete Edochie –
Igwe in *Egg of Life*



Nkiru Sylvanus – Oma in *Egg of Life*



Ebele Okaro-Onyuike – Lolo in *Egg of Life*

Part 4



Failure of the Policing System and the Emergence of Vigilante Genre Films in Nollywood: A Critical Reading of the *Issakaba* Series

4.1 Introduction

This part takes a critical look at the security system in Nigeria and how ad hoc preventive measures have been put in place by people as a matter of necessity. The four-part *Issakaba* series, produced by Chukwuka Emelionwu and Moses Nnam, and directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, has also been selected as the case study. The choice of the series is predicated on the fact that it is representative of the recourse of the citizenry to vigilante services in various parts of the country, in the face of alarming crime rates.

4.2 The Rise of Criminal Activities in Nigeria

It is on record that various forms of criminal activities characterised the end of the Nigerian Civil War. Having come out of the 30 months fratricidal war, it seemed as if many of the displaced persons decided to make ends meet at all costs, including employing unmitigated brutality and disregard for human life.

It is not surprising then that the trend has persisted to the present day. Ibrahim supports this in a survey on the involvement of children and youth in organised armed violence in Nigeria. According to him, the prolonged militarisation of Nigeria by successive military regimes had resulted in the emergence of armed groups. For instance, in a bid to perpetuate himself in office between 1993 and 1998, erstwhile military dictator, Gen. Sani Abacha, heightened ethnic and regional tension, pitting state forces against opposition groups and, in the process, igniting disputes. The disenchantment and frustration of young people, much due to mass poverty and unemployment, further increased the number of aggrieved youth, and resulted in the emergence of area boys and almajiris who target the very society that has alienated them (Ibrahim, 2006, p.1).

4.2.1 Brutality and Disregard for Human Life

The sanctity of human life has been desecrated over the years, to the extent that people kill over very little disagreements. This is to the extent that one is inundated by reports of one inhuman act or the other in our dailies. Take the case where three persons sustained injuries from machete cuts in a land dispute sometime in 2005 at Kabeama in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The victims, Abamo Olomu, Luke Olomu and Adoniba Olomu of the Olomu Compound, had invited the police from Yenagoa to effect the arrest of Fullpower Kopa, Cinema Disi, Festus Wenapere and Saborogha Peretiemo in the community in connection with the land dispute. According to Abamo, when Congo and his group arrived the scene with guns and machetes, the policemen who had no firearms took to their heels, thus, exposing him and his people to the attack (Christopher, 2005, p.15).

In a related development, a 28-year-old widow in Umuahia, the Abia State capital, who had alerted villagers one night that her brother-in-law and his wife were bent on killing her that night because of a land dispute, was found dead the following morning. She was shot in the neck and left to die in her own pool of blood. The deceased had raised an alarm that the wife of her husband's younger brother was planning to kill her

because of a piece of land under dispute, and which was scheduled for settlement on Saturday, March 12, 2005. The victim, Ifeoma Nwoha, a mother of five, whose husband had died under mysterious circumstances three years earlier, following the same land dispute, had her head resting on an open page of the Book of Psalms 68 and 69. Her bedding, the *Holy Bible* and her foam were soaked with blood, which dripped from a deep bullet wound on her neck (Onuoha, 2005b, p.13). This is an ugly incident that would have been averted if there had been an effective policing system.

4.2.2 Cultism and Ritual Practices

Two vices that have taken the front burner in the record of criminal activities in Nigeria are cultism and ritual practices. The developments have been attributed to the get-rich-quick syndrome among Nigerians. There is the tendency for people to admire those who become rich overnight, without really questioning the source of such ill-gotten wealth. People are not satisfied with what they have, and so, they resort to dubious means to improve their financial position. It is not out of place for a business man to kill for ritual purposes to improve his business or a politician to sacrifice a human being to enhance his political fortunes.

Take a news report that a middle-aged man suspected to be a ritualist was arrested in Lagos for being in possession of a human skull. The suspect, Jelili Salami, was reportedly arrested by a team of policemen from the State Criminal Investigation Department, Yaba. Apart from the human skull, a native soap, which was concealed in a small coffin, was also found in Salami's possession (Adebayo, 2005a, p.6). Another tale of the unexpected was that three persons, Kehinde Adeleje, Comfort Adetifa and Jegede Aderemi, allegedly beheaded a seven-year-old boy, Sunday Olatunji, in Iludun-Ekiti, Ilejemeje Local Government Area of Ekiti State, possibly for ritual purposes (Wahab, 2005, p.12). Furthermore, the police in Sokoto were faced with the mystery of a six-year-old boy, whose eyes were plucked out by unknown ritualists in a sugar cane farm. The boy, Umar Mohammed, of Lugu Village in Wamakko Local

Government Area, followed his brother's friend to the sugar cane farm on the promise that he (Umar) was going to be given some sugar cane. He ended up being drugged and having his eyes plucked out by his captor (Oyerinde, 2006, p. 55).

From the above reports, it is clear that fundamental human problems precipitate such acts. One could ask: Why do we have to take human lives for the purpose of self-enrichment? Why have we ignored the sanctity of human life? The Otokoto uprising in Owerri, the Imo State capital, which claimed several lives and property in many parts of the town, is still very fresh in the minds of many after a decade. Incidentally, four years after the incidence, the Bishop of the Overcomers Christian Mission, Alexander Ezeugo Ekewuba, maintained his position that he was innocent, stating,

The human skull was handed over to me by some individuals who felt that I should remove those skulls from their homes after conducting deliverance exercises in their respective houses ... I felt that I was enlightening the public by showing them what people do in public ... So by so doing, I never knew that I would incur the wrath of so many people who out of misunderstanding thought I was among the people that they were looking for. I am not in any occultic practices. From the homes of Professor Nwoke and others I got these skulls and went on television. Let me say that of all the people that suffered during the Otokoto crisis, I am the only man that has been vindicated (Duru, 2000, p.1).

Suffice to state that the scourge of cultism is something that gives parents jitters because the problem has permeated down to even the primary school level. Children of the wealthy and well-connected are the greatest targets. The reality is that if a child refuses to be initiated, he/she is pencilled down for punishment, beating or even outright elimination. This explains the preponderance of sporadic gang wars on and off campuses.

4.2.3 Armed Robbery

Armed robbery as a phenomenon has become the order of the day, so much so that in many cities, people sleep with one eye

open. Once a person is seen driving a flashy car, coming out of a bank, carrying a GMG (Ghana Must Go) bag, about to travel abroad, or coming into the country, he becomes a ready target for rampaging men of the underworld. Sometime ago, armed robbers raided a bank in Asaba, Delta State, carting away ₦10.6m, 150,000 Euros, 25,163 Pounds Sterling, 1,860 dollars, and ₦10.6m worth of MTN recharge cards. Incidentally, two night guards were subsequently arrested in connection with the crime because the police had the theory that it was an inside job (Anana, 2005b, p.7).

It is now common to find armed robbers operating with high level of sophistication and confidence. For instance, about 30 bandits were said to have been on the loose in Lagos in the early hours of a Sunday, as they besieged a bank at Ajah on the outskirts of the city and another bank at Acme Road, Ogba, Lagos. The men set out for the operation in a black jeep and a white mini-bus, arrived the premises of a bank at the Victoria Garden City area of Ajah around 2.00 am, and started shooting in the air. However, they ran out of luck as a team of the Special Anti-Bank Robbery Squad on patrol in the area foiled the operation (Adeyemi, 2005a, p.11).

If armed robbery incidents were restricted only to public buildings and people of means, the common man would have felt a little bit secured. This is not the case because, as Osofisan (1981) rightly posits, the poor do not love themselves. Of serious concern is the fact that armed robbers have become more scientific in their operations; they have also become very analytical in their modus operandi. Take a situation where a gang of armed robbers revealed that they operate on Thursdays and Fridays because they had realised that Lagosians carried more cash around on those days. The boys were in the habit of robbing taxis every week, especially at traffic jams, snatching valuables and injuring victims who refused to cooperate with them (Ogunseye, 2005, p.16).

Surprisingly, even hospitals and places of worship are not spared by robbers in their nefarious operations. A case in point was when suspected robbers numbering more than 20, on June 9, 2005, attacked the Federal Medical Centre, Gombe, destroying

property and making away with an undisclosed amount of money. The robbers, who arrived the Centre at about 2.30 am, operated for more than two hours, after tying the security man and the staffers on duty at the car park (*New Waves*, 2005, p.19). Also in Ebhoiyi, Uromi in Esan North-East Local Government Area of Edo State, armed robbers took the sum of one hundred and eighty-one thousand naira (₦181,000) and other valuables from a Catholic Priest, Rev. Father Joseph Ehiansen, and capped their heinous act by requesting the servant of God to pray for them, before escaping with their loot (Oyedele, 2005, p.13). Though robbers have not spared servants of God, the sick and the infirm, cases of robbing blood relations are unusual. This was the case when men of the Delta State police command arrested a young man for allegedly robbing and raping his own blood sister at gunpoint with an accomplice. The culprit left his slippers behind after mistakenly wearing hers and a team of detectives attached to the Divisional Police Station commenced investigation that later led to the discovery of the owner of the pair of slippers: the victim's brother (Ogwuda, 2006, p.1).

4.3 Policing and the Nigeria Police

Traditionally, policing was the responsibility of all adults in rural communities. The necessity of policing becomes even more evident in modern societies characterised by diversities and contradictions arising from population heterogeneity, urbanisation, industrialisation, conflicting ideologies on appropriate sociopolitical and economic form of organisation. In its modern sense, policing requires the services of the regular police and other paramilitary organs like Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), and Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), among others. According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2006), policing refers to *measures and actions taken by institutions and groups in a given society to regulate social relations and practices in order to secure the safety of the citizens as well as conform to the norms and values of that society* (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006, p. 3). It means that, policing is an essential in every society for the preservation of

law and order, safety and social relations.

However, what is of interest here is the place of the police in the policing system in Nigeria because community policing groups that carry out activities aimed at safety and social order do not constitute police. Susan Martin (1990) sums up the role of the police thus:

Police work involves a variety of tasks and responsibilities. Officers are expected to prevent crime, protect life and property, enforce the laws, maintain peace and public order, and provide a wide range of services to citizens ... A common trend unifying these diverse activities, however, is that potential for violence and the need and right to use coercive means in order to establish social control (as cited in Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006, p. 2).

The specific roles played by the police are defined by law, and in accordance with the political and economic interests of the dominant or ruling groups in a society. By maintaining order and enforcing law in consonance with the principles and practices of a democratic society, the police foster entrepreneurial initiative and public safety which are critical to national development. This explains why Nigerians have been inundated with pleas for the populace to embrace peace since no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere of chaos.

Like the state, the character, roles and priority of police forces are determined by the political and economic structures of that nation. Similarly, the form and activities of policing by state and non-state agencies are also dependent on the character and composition of the political economy of a given society. Police roles vary across societies with different political and economic organisations. In capitalist economies, for example, the police function mainly to protect the property and well-being of those who benefit most from an economy based on the extraction of private profit. In other words, they are created primarily in response to rioting and disorder directed against oppressive working and living conditions. Alemika (1993) argues that the police work embodies ironies, because apart

from the above, they are guardians of social order:

As an institution, the police force help to preserve, fortify and reproduce the prevailing social order, and are hardly catalyst for its change. Thus, when a social order is oppressive, exploitative and unjust, the police preserve it by suppressing and defusing demand for democracy and elimination of oppression and injustices. Similarly, in a democratic, just and equitable society, police have greater chances of serving as vanguard for social democracy, human rights and socio-economic justice (as cited in Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006, p. 6).

An analysis of the roles of the police must be located within the social, cultural, political and economic context under which the police force operate, to secure, preserve and fortify society. This informs the position of Alemika and Chukwuma that police roles and performances as well as police violence must be seen as the product of the interaction among political, economic, legal, institutional and personality factors (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006, p. 6). Generally, police formations exist to manage (detect, investigate, sort out, sieve, arrest, detain, prosecute, harass) those considered to be dangerous for the preservation of the status quo. This has characterised the Nigeria Police Force and their policing duties. With pressures from successive despotic rulers to crush every opposition, institutional neglect manifested in lack of resources, embargo on recruitment and promotion for several years, victimisation and nepotism, it is not surprising that the Nigerian police have embraced a nonchalant attitude. Put simply, brutality, extrajudicial killing, detention without trial, and corruption have become widespread in the police. Their inefficiency regarding maintenance of law and order became glaring as cases of armed robbery involving the use of sophisticated weapons as well as incidences of ethno-religious conflicts have persisted.

It would be recalled that the Nigeria Police Force dates back to 1861 when a thirty-member Consular Guard was formed in the Lagos Colony by Consul McCoskry, the acting Governor then. Governor Freeman, who took over on January 25, 1862, raised this force to 113 men, made up of one superintendent, four

sergeants, eight corporals and one hundred constables. This was followed by the formation of a 1,200-member police force, predominantly Hausa, between 1863 and 1866 (Membere, 1982, pp. 1-2). By 1896, the Lagos Police was established; while a similar force, the Niger Coast Constabulary, was formed in Calabar in 1894 under the then newly proclaimed Niger Coast Protectorate. Meanwhile, in the North, the Royal Niger Company set up the Royal Niger Company Constabulary in 1888 with headquarters at Lokoja. When the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were proclaimed in the early 1900s, part of the Royal Niger Company Constabulary became the Northern Nigeria Police, and part of the Niger Coast Constabulary became the Southern Nigeria Police. Though Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated in 1914, their police forces were not merged until 1930, when the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was formed with headquarters in Lagos (Oladele, 2006, p. 6).

However, the Nigeria Police Force coexisted with local administration police forces in Local Government Areas in Western Nigeria and the Native Authorities in Northern Nigeria between 1930 and 1966. The dual system of police was disbanded in 1966 under the Gen. Aguiyi-Ironsi regime because they were poorly trained, corrupt and used for partisan political purposes, including brutalisation of opponents, by politicians and traditional rulers in Northern Nigeria as well as by political parties and governments in power in the Northern and Western Regions. Specifically, in March 1966, Aguiyi-Ironsi set up a Working Party on Nigeria Police, Local Government and Native Authority Police and Prisons, to examine among other issues the feasibility of the unification of the Nigeria Police and the Local Government Police. The overall objective of the Aguiyi-Ironsi regime was to introduce a unitary polity in the country. This explains his charge when constituting the panel:

To examine the factors which have contributed in producing a distorted image of the machinery for police administration in the minds of the Nigerian public and formulate concrete proposals for correcting any deficiencies (as cited in Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006, p. 10).

From the historical point of view, it can be said that the Nigerian Police Force was established along the lines dictated by the indirect rule policy. The British Colonial administration established its presence by creating a police force for any territory it conquered. Second, violence and fraud were employed in the conquest of indigenous populations, and police forces under various names were established and employed as instruments of violence and oppression against the indigenous population. Third, given the character of colonial rule, police forces were the instruments used to sustain the hegemony of the colonialists. These three features of colonialism led the public to regard colonial police forces as their enemies and as instruments of violence and subjugation; as extortionists and harbingers of bad news and trouble. Unfortunately, these perceptions of the police by the people have persisted to the present day. Owens Onoge (1993, p. 178) states that,

The burden of colonial policing was the subordination of the national interests of the people to the political and economic interest of the state. Through armed patrols, raids, arrests and detention, the colonial police protected the colonial economy by policing labour ... The police, in the consciousness of the people, became the symbol of the dictatorial establishment rather than the protector of the people's rights. As the people had no checks over the arbitrariness of the police, they either avoided "police trouble" or mediated inevitable contacts with bribe offerings (as cited in Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006, p. 9).

Significantly, the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999) has provisions on the Nigeria Police Force, the Police Council, and the Police Service Commission. Section 214(1) states that,

There shall be a Police Force for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and subject to the provisions of this section, no other police force shall be established for the Federation or any part thereof (p. 83).

As at January 2001, the Nigeria Police Force numbered 163,722, out of which 20,287 were recruits in training (Alemika

& Chukwuma, 2006, p.10). The establishment, organisation, control, command and management of the Nigeria Police Force, are governed by the *Police Act (CAP 359) of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria* (1990), and the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999). For example, Section 4 of the *Police Act* provides that,

The police shall be employed for the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are charged, and shall perform such military duties within or without Nigeria as may be required ... (p. 5).

Members of the Nigeria Police Force have statutory powers to investigate crimes, apprehend offenders, interrogate and prosecute suspects, grant bail to suspects, pending completion of investigation or prior to court arraignment, serve summons, and regulate or disperse processions and assemblies. Due to a combination of structural factors (political oppression and instability as well as economic exploitation, mass poverty, widespread corruption, and so on) and institutional inadequacies (poor quality of personnel, inadequate training, poor facilities, poor salaries and general conditions of service, and negative public image), the Nigeria Police Force are ill-equipped to perform their functions well and in compliance with the rule of law. Paradoxically, experience has shown that the performance of such functions always tilt in favour of any government in power (derogatorily dubbed, A.G.I.P.). In other words, what is evident is that they are highly and visibly partisan and subservient to the government, and to the rich and powerful, in rendering their services. A former Inspector-General of Police of the Nigeria Police Force, Ibrahim Coomassie (1998, p.10), adds credence to this position when he states that,

... any time a citizen becomes a public figure, his first official correspondence on assuming duty is to write the Inspector-General of Police to ask for an orderly and policemen to guard his house ... Everybody wants to use the Police as status symbol, yet the members of

the organisation remain without accommodation, adequate remuneration, tools to work with, transport to patrol, effective communication and appropriate intelligence outfit to support their operations (as cited in Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006, p. 13).

4.4 The Failure of the Policing System in Nigeria

The point has been made that the Nigeria Police Force is responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the country. Ironically, when one enters any police station, the following public relations messages are seen on the wall: **The Police is Your Friend**; in another corner: **Help the Police to Help You!** Unfortunately, the experiences in police stations are markedly different. Few Nigerians see the police as friends because of different harrowing experiences in police stations. People would rather leave an accident or armed robbery victim to his fate rather than go with such a victim to a police station, because the supposed Good Samaritan may just be branded the prime suspect and be clamped into detention. Thus, there is the feeling in several quarters that the Nigeria Police have failed in their civic responsibility of maintaining law and order. Even the formation of the Police-Community Relations Committees has not helped matters. It is in this light that some of the problems associated with the Nigeria Police shall be briefly highlighted

Narrating a personal encounter with the Nigeria Police, Nwana states that he once had cause to report a burglary in his house to the police. According to him, the investigators made him to believe that they would have made an arrest had he induced them sufficiently. He even had to pay for the paper on which he wrote his complaint, and also paid for the investigators' trips to Kwara and Enugu States in the course of investigations. To compound his disappointment, the police paid unwarranted visits to his house under the guise of giving him an update on the case and each visit meant beer and 'kola' in an envelope, which eventually made him to give up on the matter. Thus, Nwana submits that the police cannot be a friend:

The situation on the ground is that only criminals and potential criminals seek the friendship of the Nigerian

police, not honest decent men and women (Nwana, 2000, p. 3).

On April 10, 2002, it was reported that President Olusegun Obasanjo had sent a bill to the National Assembly, entitled, *Prohibition of Certain Associations Act 2002*, which would have given him the power to dissolve and proscribe militia or quasi-military groups formed for the purposes of furthering political, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural interests. The bill also raised concerns about potentially sweeping powers that may be granted to the president to outlaw a broad range of organisations, including some which may not use or advocate violence, but which could be outlawed on the basis of their perceived opposition to or criticism of the government.

Somehow, to enhance the performance of the police, the Federal Government announced its intention to embark on a major reform and expansion of the police force, including a yearly recruitment of 40,000 officers and men for five years, under its five-year development plan launched in 2000. It also promised to procure new equipment and launched a campaign to try to improve the image of the police. However, in spite of the recruitment of additional police officers, the personnel remain dramatically insufficient, working conditions continued to be extremely poor and training facilities seriously inadequate. Morale became so low that on January 31, 2002, in an unprecedented move, the police went on strike to protest outstanding salaries and other conditions of service. The strike, which was masterminded by junior officers, was quickly suppressed by the government, which declared it illegal and tantamount to mutiny. Several police officers accused of organising the strike were arrested and summarily tried for mutiny and treasonable felony. The redeeming thing about this development is that on the heels of the strike action, the Federal Government addressed some of the burning issues raised by the striking policemen. The sum of one billion naira was immediately released to the police authorities to pay outstanding allowances of officers and men of the force. Furthermore, the Police Service Commission promoted 17,000 superior officers of the force in the first instance, and delegated powers for the

promotion of junior ones to the Inspector-General of Police in March 2002 ("HRW/CLEEN Report," 2001).

4.4.1 Police Brutality, Rights Abuses and Ineptitude

Cases of police brutality and arrant human rights abuses abound in Nigeria. Officers and men of the police vent their frustrations on innocent law-abiding citizens every day. The truth of the matter is that if you report any case of armed robbery in a police station, it is viewed as if you are bothering the officers. For instance, on March 16, 2005, the Public Relations Officer of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) for Zone B, Comrade Jerry Umukiro, was given a black eye in the course of a demonstration by students of the Rivers State College of Education (COE), Port Harcourt. The students were protesting what they termed, an arbitrary hike of the school fees, hostel accommodation fees, final year eligibility and registration levies, and basic social amenities in the institution (Chukwurah, 2005, p.17).

It is true that our tertiary institutions are inundated with students' unrests which have very often led to interminable closures of institutions of higher learning in the country. But it can be argued that the volatile nature of students in higher institutions is mostly aggravated by indiscretion on the part of our law enforcement agents. On the highways, motorists are daily harassed by the police, as exemplified in the pathetic Apo Six case. Incidents like that involving ordinary citizens occur daily, and most of such cases are hardly reported because of the status of the persons involved. For instance, life was snuffed out of a dutiful young panel beater near Obigbo in Rivers State, when a policeman jumped suddenly in front of his car and he could not apply the brakes on time (Aladelokun, 2006, pp. 5, 6). Only recently, the police in Abia State were accused of killing an undergraduate of Abia State University, Uturu when he was returning home one evening. Chibueze Ibeleme, a part three Microbiology student, was hit in his right rib by a bullet fired at two other fleeing students the police had come to arrest (Onuoha, 2005a, p. 5).

Like a locket on one's neck, bribery is an endemic corrupt practice which has given the police a very bad image. It is usual for a policeman to say: ***Nothing goes for nothing!*** In other words, if you have a problem in a police station, you must be ready to part with a reasonable amount of money; if not, you are likely to face unsavoury circumstances. The implication is that you pay for bail, which is touted to be free; or certain obstacles would be placed deliberately before you. It was reported that five police officers from the highway patrol team operating in Anambra State were arrested on May 1, 2005, at the Asaba end of the Niger Bridge by a special squad of the Nigeria Police, while extorting money from motorists in an illegal checkpoint they had mounted. Unfortunately, they asked then Delta State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Udom Ekpoudom, for bribe, not knowing his identity (Anana, 2005a, p. 4). There are also incidences of mass arrests of citizens by the police on very flimsy excuses. Incidentally, to secure their release or regain their freedom, detainees are made to part with some money (Adeyemi, 2005c, p. 6).

The police have institutionalised the class structure in the dispensation of justice in the country. Those who have money, power and authority have their way when it comes to police matters. The reverse is the case for the common man whose hope in the legal system is not even guaranteed. In mid-2005 for instance, the police authorities failed to produce a former Chief of Naval Staff, Vice-Admiral Samuel Afolayan, at a Federal High Court, Lagos, despite an order to that effect by Justice Dan Abutu on May 23, 2005 (Uwaleke & Badejo, 2005, p. 3).

Perhaps the greatest critics that have put the Nigeria Police on their toes are student union bodies and human rights and environmental activists. This is where vibrant lawyers like Chief Gani Fawehimi, Femi Falana, Festus Keyamo, Oronto Douglas, and Leedum Mitte, among others, need special mention. As it were, it could be stated that the image of the Nigeria Police has been tarnished to a large extent, not irredeemably though, due to a combination of factors. The following analysis by Alemika aptly encapsulates this summation:

The Nigeria Police Force is still largely vicious and corrupt. Political opponents of governments and military administrations – usually workers, students, radicals and human rights activists – continue to suffer excessive and recurrent waves of brutalities, abductions, unwarranted searches and violations of privacy and private family life, extra-judicial killings, bodily injury, intimidation, harassment and loss of personal liberties in the hands of the police and sundry state “intelligence” and security agencies in the country (as cited in Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006, pp.13-14).

Nonetheless, there are indications that the above negative impressions could be ameliorated if conscious efforts are geared toward laundering the image of the police. As a point of fact, there are bright spots in the force, as will be examined subsequently.

4.4.2 The Nigerian Police as Friends

Though the police have been criticised for not being true friends, it can be said that they are trying in a modest way, within available resources. The excuses by the police high command include lack of funds, poor crime fighting facilities, lack of personnel, unwillingness of the public to divulge relevant information to the police, harbouring of criminals by the society, and executive intervention from high places, among others. A look at breakthroughs in crime fighting shows that the Nigeria Police are actually trying to combat the menace. The police swooped on area boys and arrested about 200 of the miscreants because of an order from the Presidency to rid Lagos of Area Boys (street urchins) (Sunday, 2005, p.64). They also recovered 39 rounds of live ammunition and two AK 47 rifles concealed in a car abandoned in front of House 8, Sanusi Street, Mushin, Lagos (Adeyemi, 2005b, p.6).

As a result of the multifarious nature of armed robbery cases, the police celebrate their successful raids against armed robbery and petty thieves. For instance, the Delta State Police Command once said it had smashed a gang of thieves, who specialised in the snatching of mobile phones at social engagements.

The robbers normally studied obituary posters for information on villages and towns where burial or wake-keep ceremonies would take place (Lartey, 2005, p. 7). Similarly, the police were reported to have arrested 30 armed robbery suspects from their hideouts, recovering one AK 47 riffle, three single barrel guns, one locally made double-barrelled gun, one pistol, and seven expended 7.6mm shells. The suspects admitted their nefarious robbery operations during which they carted away money, handsets, police uniforms and other valuables (Uwujare, 2006, p.44). Unfortunately, one question that Nigerians have not found answers to is, how these men of the underworld acquire these sophisticated weapons. Most times, the police appear hapless in the face of the superior firepower of the armed robbers. Since the officers and men of the police are all human, they usually beat a retreat once they face the sophisticated weaponry of armed robbers; and the usual language then is that, “the police had to withdraw for reinforcement,” or, “the police are on top of the situation.”

The efforts of the Lagos State Police Command to reduce crime in the state yielded another positive result with the crackdown on seven robbery suspects. The suspects, popularly referred to as, ‘catch in the air’ or ‘one chance,’ were among those that were terrorising unsuspecting members of the public inside commercial buses by posing as passengers. Having operated in some other parts of the metropolis, the suspects moved to Shomolu area in their Volkswagen commercial bus marked XE 612 FKJ to continue their vicious act. As usual, one of the gang members, posing as a bus conductor, succeeded in attracting unsuspecting passengers into the bus. No sooner had the bus left the spot than the robbers demanded that those who valued their lives should make all valuables, including money, in their possessions available to them (Adetayo, 2005c, p. 7). In the face of such a dilemma, the decision to surrender or otherwise is left for the passenger. Incidentally, cases like this abound all over the country.

At this juncture, it is necessary to return to the question as to how the men of the underworld acquire their weapons. One school of thought has it that these robbers were hired as party

thugs by politicians to feather their nests. They (the politicians) did this by arming them (the party thugs) with all sorts of weapons. On assuming office, they abandoned such loyalists due to greed and personal aggrandisement. Abandoned by their patrons, and with no jobs to fall back on, such youths used the weapons to vent their frustration, most times, on innocent citizens. Another school of thought has it that the acquisition of arms and ammunition by men of the underworld has been the handiwork of officers and men of the Nigeria Police. The thinking is that with poor conditions of service, unscrupulous policemen sell small arms to robbers as a survival strategy. It is common knowledge that the Nigeria Police are not well paid; the high level of neglect is felt right from the Police Training College, where recruits sew their own uniforms. Since the norm is “survival of the fittest,” or “who no dey no dey,” every police officer thinks primarily of how best to keep his family relatively comfortable. This drives the bad eggs to sell or hire arms and ammunitions to armed robbers, aid and abet armed robberies, divulge vital information to the men of the underworld, and sometimes provide cover to robbers, as was the case with Lawrence Anini, alias ‘De Law’ in Benin, Edo State.

Curiously, the police have passed the buck to the general public and allege that people are reluctant to help the police to fight crime. Many Nigerians would rather have nothing to do with the identity of armed robbers, for fear of their personal safety. For instance, you can put away an armed robber behind bars today; and tomorrow, he would be walking the street, a free man. The police also suffer from inferiority complex, in relation to other uniformed personnel, especially the army, the navy and the air force. In Lagos, for example, there is a long-standing practice of military and paramilitary officers being exempt from paying transport fares in big (molue) buses. In danfo (small) buses, what obtains is that once one uniformed officer has boarded, others who board later are expected to pay. To ensure compliance, the conductor informs such officers that there is already one “staff” on board. Very often, there are some ugly encounters, as to who should enjoy the free ride. If a policeman happens to have boarded a bus before a soldier, for

example, he (the soldier) would insist that the policeman should pay, for him (the soldier) to enjoy the free ride. Such actions have, most times, precipitated violent clashes between officers and men of the police and those of the armed forces.

4.5 The Rise of Vigilantism in Nigeria

The high level of insecurity prevalent in most urban cities had necessitated the adoption of various security measures to safeguard lives and property. In Lagos, for example, residents started by building very high walls that even obfuscated the beauty of residential houses. They soon realised that these walls did not deter the dare-devils from operating. In fact, some armed robbers gained entrance into compounds by breaking through the walls of fences. Consequently, residents resorted to erecting iron gates across streets, usually manned, in most cases, by non-literate Hausa night guards, armed with daggers, or bows and arrows. Residents in such areas agreed as to when the gates would be locked every night and when to be opened in the mornings. The belief was that it would be easy to apprehend suspected armed robbers that way. They realised again that men of the underworld still operated freely, in spite of the protective measures. The result was the formation of neighbourhood vigilante groups that took care of the security of the neighbourhood in turns. This meant preparing a security duty roster for residents of various compounds, and ensuring that everyone adhered to the schedules.

Incidentally, the use of vigilante groups, which was purely for personal or group safety, has been given ethnic colouration due to exigencies in the Nigerian political arena. For example, the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) has since become a force to reckon with in the sociopolitical landscape of Western Nigeria. The Arewa People's Congress and several Hisbah groups have become dominant in the northern part of the country. The Onitsha Market Amalgamated Traders Association (OMATA), the Bakassi Boys (BB) and the Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), have since surfaced among the Igbo-speaking states of eastern Nigeria and have influenced the ideological inclination of the people to a large extent.

The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which was the brainchild of the late environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, appeared to blaze the trail in the Niger Delta. The heartless execution of Saro-Wiwa precipitated a chain of reactions that has reverberated to the present day. The Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), the Ijaw Youths Council (IYC), and the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), popularly known as the Egbesu Boys, are some of the youth groups that have been formed to protect the communal interests of the Ijaw. It is pertinent to give the background of some of these groups to properly situate the film under study.

4.5.1 *The Odua Peoples' Congress*

The Odua Peoples' Congress is a pan-Yoruba organisation that has become a strong force in Western Nigeria, to the extent that its position cannot be totally ignored in national issues. Odua Peoples' Congress, or OPC, as it is popularly called, was established in August 1994 by Dr. Frederick Fasehun, with the primary aim of defending, protecting and promoting Yoruba interests. However, Chief Gani Adams (aka Ganiyu Adams) was to later lead a splinter militant group in 1999, which has since become a parallel group. This militant wing, which consisted mainly of young supporters, was uncompromising and objected to the OPC playing any part in Nigeria's political transition programme.

The OPC is a complex organisation that had taken on different roles as it had adapted to the changing political and security environment in Nigeria. Its activities had ranged from political agitation for Yoruba autonomy, the promotion of Yoruba culture, violent confrontations with members of other ethnic groups, to vigilantism and crime fighting. According to a recent study on the OPC, these last two main areas of activity – ethnic militancy and vigilantism – involve children and youth mostly. The OPC utilised the public's disillusionment with the police and concerns about persistent insecurity and rising crime, and their role in fighting such vices, as a way of legitimising their existence (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 8). In making the public believe

that they have magical powers and charms to overpower criminals and protect individuals, the OPC built up a reputation as a force that is more effective than the police in Yorubaland. They maintained an active presence during the day and night, patrolling the streets in groups of up to thirty and openly carrying rifles, pistols, cutlasses and knives. Instant justice is often handed out to suspected criminals by members of the OPC, through summary executions, including burning people alive while 'necklaced' with disused car tyres (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 9).

Probably due to his disinclination towards violent means, Fasehun appears to have lost influence in the Yoruba community. Still, like Adams, Fasehun had been detained and released without trial several times by the security agencies of government. As at December 1, 2005, Fasehun and Adams were both clamped into prison detention on trumped up charges of treason, illegal possession of firearms, and membership of an unlawful society. Respite only came their way in December 2006, when the judge handling their case discharged and acquitted them.

4.5.2 The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)

The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) is an organisation representing the Ogoni people in Rivers State in the struggle for ethnic and environmental rights. Its primary antagonists are the Federal Government of Nigeria and Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) which had ignored the developmental needs of the people in spite of the crude oil and gas wealth exploited from the area. It was founded by some educated Ogoni elites and chiefs, including its first President, Garrick Barile Leton, E. N. Kobani, Meshack Karanwi, and the then President of the Ethnic Minority Rights Organisation of Africa, Ken Saro-Wiwa. MOSOP initiated its efforts with a bold declaration, the *Ogoni Bill of Rights* in 1990, which was addressed to the Federal Government. The Bill read like a model statement before a mediator, which listed the concerns of the Ogoni people, namely, oil-related suffering of the people, government neglect, lack of social amenities, and political marginalisation. These

concerns were placed in the context of a self-definition of the Ogoni, as a separate and distinct ethnic nationality. It was on this basis that MOSOP sought autonomy, environmental protection, control of a fair share of the revenues from crude oil extracted from their land, and cultural rights, such as the use of their local languages ("Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People," p.1).

Beginning from December 1992, the conflict escalated as the Nigerian military government saw the agitations as undermining its authority and overt violence was applied on a large scale by the ruling military dictatorship. At the same time, the Ogoni people, while embracing non-violence tactics, began to occasionally veer into acts of violence. The collision course between the two parties became inevitable when MOSOP issued an ultimatum to Shell, Chevron and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC), demanding some \$10 billion in accumulated royalties, damages and compensation, immediate stoppage of environmental degradation, and negotiations for mutual agreement on all future drilling of oil. There was also a proviso that if the companies failed to comply, the Ogoni would embark on mass action to disrupt their operations. By this act, the Ogoni shifted the focus of their actions from an unresponsive Federal Government to oil companies actively engaged in oil prospecting in the region. The basis for this assignment of responsibility was the benefits that had accrued to the oil companies that were extracting the natural wealth of the Ogoni land.

Reflective of military dictatorships, especially in Africa, soldiers and mobile policemen were drafted to most Ogoni villages by May 21, 1994. Unfortunately, four Ogoni chiefs were brutally murdered on that day. These persons, who were among those derogatorily referred to as vultures in the heat of the Ogoni struggle were seen as reactionaries and pro-government agents. Ken Saro-Wiwa, head of the opposing faction, who had been denied entry into Ogoniland on the day of the murders, was detained in connection with the killings. Lt. Col. Dauda Musa Komo, then Rivers State Military Administrator, did not wait for a judicial investigation before associating the killings with

MOSOP. By mid-June 1994, the occupying forces, led by Major Paul Okutimo of Rivers State Internal Security, had completely devastated about 30 villages, detained more than 600 people, and killed at least 40. These atrocities were committed under the guise that the security men were searching for those directly responsible for the killings of the Ogoni four. In the final analysis, an estimated 100,000 internal refugees and 2,000 civilian deaths were recorded. On November 10, 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight MOSOP activists, namely, Barinem Kiobel, John Kpuinen, Baribo Bera, Saturday Dobee, Felix Nwate, Nordu Eawo, Paul Levura, and Daniel Gbokoo, were hanged by the Abacha military junta (Nwako, 1995, p. 1-2). MOSOP has since been under the leadership of Leedum Mite, who appears to have soft-pedalled on the militant stance of the movement.

4.5.3 The Egbesu Boys of Africa

Since the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri (in the present Bayelsa State) in 1956, oil companies, such as Shell (Anglo/Dutch), Agip (Italian), Elf (French) and Chevron (American), through their oil exploration and exploitation activities, have perpetrated a war of economic and environmental degradation in Ijawland. Little wonder then that the late Ijaw freedom fighter, Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, pioneered the agitation for resource control, when he formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) and subsequently announced the birth of the Niger Delta Republic, and declared a state of emergency on Saturday, January 29, 1966.

It is interesting to note that the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), led by Comrade T.K. Ogoriba, was at the forefront of the mobilisation of the Ijaw of the Niger Delta in the mid-1990s. Incidentally, in spite of providing a greater percentage of the nation's wealth, many of these Ijaw youths are unemployed. As it were, violence has become gainful employment and a veritable survival strategy for them. Borrowing a leaf from the exploits of MOSOP, Ijaw youths have gradually taken the centre stage, leading the struggle for resource control. It is not surprising, therefore, that they eventually organised themselves into various

groups, namely, the Ijaw Youths Council led by Felix Tuodolo, the Egbesu Boys (or the Supreme Egbesu Assembly), led by Sergeant Winipre Digifa, Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and the Niger Delta Volunteers Force (NDVF) led by Alhaji Mujahid Asari Dokubo, which is more of a rebirth of the Boroist Movement. Several splinter Egbesu Boys have since turned to extortion, oil bunkering, pipeline vandalisation, sea piracy, and hostage-taking, all for personal gains.

The Ijaw National Congress (INC), an umbrella body for all Ijaw, has also been involved in the struggle to achieve cultural reorientation and emancipation of the Ijaw, in particular, from decades of environmental pollution, corporate violence, unjust socioeconomic structure and political oppression. At the height of agitations, Ijaw youths met in Kaiama, headquarters of the present Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area, and hometown of late Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, and issued what has come to be known as the *Kaiama Declaration* on Friday, December 11, 1998. In it, the Ijaw Youth Congress, which was formed to collectively fight the Ijaw cause, demanded the immediate withdrawal from Ijawland of all military forces of occupation and repression by the Federal Government; and that any oil company that employed the services of the armed forces to protect its operations would be viewed as an enemy of the Ijaw people.

Egbesu is the Ijaw god or deity of warfare. It is the offensive and defensive power of the god, used to protect righteous people from the forces of evil. In its original context, Egbesu was the main spiritual tool (weapon) for combating and overcoming evil. According to Benatari, Egbesu plays a leading role in making sure that society is governed by moral principles instead of greed. Egbesu operates on the principle of synergy. All factors that will establish righteousness must come into play before the force of Egbesu produces an effect. Egbesu cannot be utilised by the ordinary man, as he or she lacks spiritual discipline. The deity or god of warfare (to the layman), can only be utilised by the righteous or upright beings (through wise guidance to wage

a war that is just); it cannot be called upon by evil-doers or be used for dubious purposes. The god, deity or angel of warfare is not called upon to start a war, but to end injustice, conflict and confusion; he comes, not to start a war, but to end it; and that is why it is only in exceptional circumstances that it is called upon (Benatari, 2005, p.6).

One of the exceptional circumstances is when an individual or community is under attack from other communities with evil or diabolical intentions (evil forces), and they themselves are innocent and blameless. In calling upon the benevolent forces of Egbesu in times of conflict, where it is clear that you are not at fault, you must not give in to fear; because any time you give in to fear, you deny the Egbesu spirit from dwelling in you. It is understandable then why Egbesu has been called upon by concerned Ijaw people in the protection of the Niger Delta environment, against those who destroy it continually through ecological and environmental degradation occasioned by oil exploration, and against the corrupt elite who are ruling Nigeria who want to infringe and violate the God-given rights of the Ijaw people to a fair share of the resources that are being generated in Ijawland.

The adherents stress that for Egbesu to be effective in protecting the collective interests of the Ijaw people, there is the need for the people to be united in purpose and root out corruption. Without these conditions, Egbesu will react according to our due because the law of “you reap what you sow” must take its course. This is why, in recent practice, Egbesu adherents slept for seven days in graveyards for purposes of fortification, and bathed in “Egbesu water” for them to be supposedly invincible before embarking on militant operations. A person so fortified is believed to be impenetrable to bullets and from machete cuts as far as he keeps himself pure. Thus, to sustain the invincibility, Egbesu Boys are supposed to abstain from women and eschew evil deeds, especially before such operations. Somehow, instead of defending lives and safeguarding property, the activities of the Egbesu Boys in the Niger Delta have consisted of kidnapping expatriate oil workers for ridiculous ransoms, sabotaging oil installations and

attacking law enforcement agents. It is believed that lately, wealthy individuals and top politicians in the Niger Delta region have also used the Egbesu Boys as “private armies.”

Although the group’s administrative power remains in the hands of the president, who holds regular parliaments in the clans, towns and villages of Ijawland, the Egbesu Boys’ rebellion is a grassroots youth movement organised from the bottom up. The way the body was conceived is seen from the following observation:

Arguably, the most militarily accompanied of these ethnic armies is the Egbesu Boys, which has taken on the might of the Nigerian military machine and is not in a hurry to capitulate. The group with the most potential for destabilisation is the factionalised OPC, which not only questions the viability of the Nigerian state, but has in fact taken over some functions of the state in its area of operation. The most ominous of the groups is the APC, which represents an inevitable counter-thesis to what is perceived as the excesses of the OPC (as cited in Ibrahim, 2000, p. 7).

Due to their use of sophisticated weaponry, speedboats and satellite telecommunication gadgets, it is believed that the militant groups in the Niger Delta are well financed; and that highly influential members of the area are financially supporting them. In addition to armed confrontations with the state security forces and oil company personnel, the Egbesu Boys are also in regular dispute with other ethnic groups, especially the Itsekiri, the Urhobo, and the Ilaje.

It is worrisome that successive governments in Nigeria have continued to militarise the Niger Delta area by sending anti-riot police, soldiers and navy personnel to the area. It was in response to such state highhandedness that armed youths kidnapped and eventually killed 12 police officers in Odi, Bayelsa State, in November 1999. On Thursday, November 11, 1999, the government responded decisively to the killing by invading Odi with armed military personnel, leading to the killing of hundreds of people including women, children, old people, and security personnel.

However, it can be argued that the Egbesu phenomenon in recent times is attributable to the Abacha regime, which tried to perpetrate itself in office. Tasie (2004) lends credence to this position when he states that,

... under the General Abacha self-succession strategies the youths from the south-south zone were enticed and transported to Abuja – most of them visiting Abuja for the first time – they saw at firsthand how the oil money which was derived directly from the devastations and the ruins of their own immediate environment by the exploitation and marketing of their God-given endowments had transformed an area which hitherto had not been noted for anything remarkable or spectacular into a most famous city, easily the finest African city as they heard Abuja proudly advertise it. Besides, as they journeyed on that ill-fated adventure, they also noticed the roads, and particularly experienced how from the terribly rough Niger Delta roads, they, at some boundary points between the north and the south, transited onto smooth roads soon after leaving the Niger Delta region. It is plausible that many of them, after that trip, must have made new vows never to relent in the struggle to take their future in their hands (Tasie, 2004, p. 8).

In Rivers State, for example, government ran short of openly approving the operations of the Egbesu Boys. The seeming legitimisation of the activities of Egbesu Boys, like Ateke Tom and Asari Dokubo, who were then ready instruments in the hands of the political class, made their profiles to rise. Both activists were to later fall out with the government in power and were either incarcerated (Asari) or put on the run (Ateke).

4.5.4 The Arewa People's Congress and Hisbah Groups

The Arewa People's Congress (APC) is a recent organisation formed to protect the Northern Nigerian interests as they complained of being marginalised by the Obasanjo government. As with the emergence of other groups in Nigeria, the APC was formed as a militant wing of the Arewa Consultative Forum

(a sociopolitical and ethno-religious group) in response to increasing insecurity in the country, to protect the interests of the Hausa-Fulani in the north. Led by Sagir Mohammed, a retired army captain, the organisation seeks to, “safeguard and protect Northern interest, wherever it is, and to respond to further attacks on Northerners in any part of the country, particularly Lagos State, where the OPC is unleashing terror on the Northerners” (Ibrahim, 2006, p.15).

The hisbah vigilantes constitute a major source for using children and youth in violent confrontations. They are Islamic vigilantes in the predominantly Muslim states of the northern part of the country that have adopted the Sharia legal system in the last few years. The states include Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Niger, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara, and Gombe. Incidentally, none of the hisbah groups is well organised; neither do they have any central command. They have often spearheaded violent conflicts with Christians and other non-Muslims in the North. Most of the hisbah groups are sponsored by state governments that practise Sharia and draw their membership from the army of the unemployed in those states. In most cases, the hisbah groups arbitrarily arrest offenders of the Sharia legal code and dispense their idea of justice without recourse to the traditional law enforcement agencies. The hisbah are armed with locally made guns, bows and arrows, and knives, and include children and adolescents drawn from the almajiris, school dropouts, and street boys. Some are even from neighbouring countries. These young people are recruited as religious police and deployed within the affected states for the purposes of enforcing the Sharia law.

Independent preachers and mosques, widespread in the northern states, have also used the APC and hisbah groups to mobilise young children through appeals for social justice and religious purity. These movements have drawn upon a large pool of disaffected young people because they have been disillusioned by the social, economic, and political conditions prevailing in the country. For example, angered by a commentary on the Miss World Beauty Pageant appearing in a major national newspaper, crowds of armed children burned

the publication's Kaduna offices and then attacked Christian locations and political targets in the central parts of the city. Also, a cartoon, purportedly portraying Prophet Mohammed in a negative light, in faraway Sweden, precipitated riots in the northern part of the country, which claimed many lives.

4.5.5 The Bakassi Boys

The rise of vigilantism in its current form, especially in the south-east of Nigeria, can be traced back to the explosion of violent crimes which rocked the city of Aba, in Abia State and its surroundings in 1997 and 1998. The commercial town of Aba, which hosts the popular Ariaria Market, was gripped by insecurity and lawlessness as armed robbery and other forms of violent crime reached unprecedented levels. Robbery and extortion by armed gangs, the most prominent of which were known as the Mafia, became a daily routine and began to affect more than just the population of Aba, as traders from all over the country who used to come to Aba to transact business in the Ariaria Market, began staying away from the town out of fear. Frustration and anger at the insecurity and intimidation suffered at the hands of criminals in Aba exploded when armed robbers killed a pregnant woman near the market in Aba sometime in October 1999. Incensed by the dastardly act, the traders mobilised people to hunt down the perpetrators; and three days of violence and destruction ensued as the traders clashed with the alleged criminals. Consequently, the Shoe Makers' Association occupying the Bakassi wing of Ariaria Market decided to organise a vigilante group to defend themselves against criminals. The vigilante group was to unleash its own killing spree, unprecedented in the history of Aba, as they killed and burnt suspected criminals and their accomplices.

With the considerable success in curbing the armed robbers, the traders set about turning their vigilante group into a more permanent institution by providing them with a building to use as their headquarters and paying them regular salaries. The vigilante volunteers abandoned their normal occupations to become full-time members of the group, which became known as the Bakassi Boys. Predictably, the giant stride of the Bakassi

Boys in Aba was closely watched by other cities in south-eastern Nigeria, which were also experiencing high levels of violent crime. The magic in ridding the Ariaria Market of criminals and the perceived mythical invincibility of the Bakassi Boys led to clamours for the extension of their operations to other cities.

Like Aba, Onitsha is a centre for traders from all over Nigeria and the large volumes of cash which changed hands in the market on daily basis, had been a flashpoint for organised violent crime. In the 1980s, the Onitsha Amalgamated Traders' Association (OMATA) had set up a vigilante group, known as OMATA Security. Initially created to maintain security inside the market, OMATA was eventually replaced by another group, the Onitsha Traders Association (OTA), which became the precursor of the Bakassi Boys' operations in the city. Officially set up on September 25, 1999, with the support of the then Anambra State governor, Chief Chinwoke Mbadinuju, OTA used extremely brutal methods in its mission to drive away violent criminals from the city. Eventually, public outrage at OTA's methods led to calls for its dissolution in July 2000 and the Bakassi Boys came in to take over from OTA, to great public acclaim. In August 2000, a law was passed, officially establishing the organisation under the name, Anambra State Vigilante Services ("HRW Report," 2001).

It is worth noting that the bid by the Bakassi Boys to oust OTA and take over their functions was marked by violence. Five members of OTA were killed and beheaded in the market by the Bakassi Boys, close to their headquarters, while the police watched and did not intervene. Somehow, the Bakassi Boys defended their action, claiming that the five men were armed robbers masquerading as OTA members ("HRW Report," 2001). Since they were first created in Aba, there had been increasingly serious divisions among the Bakassi Boys operating in different states, particularly between those in Abia and Anambra States. Those from Abia became known as the original or authentic Bakassi, while those in the other states were sometimes described as not authentic or fake Bakassi. While the traders' associations initially financed the Bakassi Boys, state governments soon took over this role; but the traders still contributed significantly to

their upkeep, through monthly levies. Businesses, local governments, and other institutions were also all asked to contribute a tax towards the sustenance of the Bakassi Boys.

In an analysis of the Bakassi phenomenon, Akwani (2006) states that Nigerians in the Diaspora made the common mistake of equating the Bakassi Boys to other decidedly political extra-judicial outfits like the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) or the Arewa Peoples Congress (APC). They were alarmed at the time that the Bakassi Boys were being brought under the patronage of the state governors. Oppositions to the extension of governors' patronage were in principle given that vigilante groups, as a rule, operated without the guidance of established laws. Rather, they worked in defiance of such laws, especially when their inspiration was political. According to Akwani, when he visited Nigeria in September 2001, he saw calendars and almanacs telling the saga of Bakassi exploits in offices and homes of many Easterners. He affirms that many Easterners remain traumatised by the events that led to the emergence of the vigilante group. People stayed indoors and barred their doors and windows with iron/steel protectors for fear of men of the underworld. Such was the fearful state of things in the east before the Bakassi came to clean up the crime and stem the lawlessness, and the people heaved a sigh of relief, grateful for the intervention. Akwani opines that even policemen were happy that the Bakassi Boys came into the scene and the two groups worked out an amicable arrangement for operation. He observes that the nefarious activities of one Eddy Okeke gave rise to the Bakassi Boys:

Before the Bakassi Boys, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was lawlessness and high crime in Eastern Nigeria. This was mainly due to the existence of a small number of influential men who sponsored the criminals. One of the most notorious of these men was a rasputinic character, Eddy Okeke, pastor and founder of a local 'Christian' cult. Okeke claimed the ability to heal many ills, make acolytes rich and give them power over things temporal and spiritual. He was also reputed to be a friend and adviser to most of the men in power at the federal level (Akwani, 2006, pp.1-2).

Akwani states that Okeke and his followers were known for ostentatious living and they publicly beat up those that opposed them, including government officials and even policemen. Taking them to court was a pointless affair as they were invariably set free by judges who were intimidated by Okeke's high profile. Serious opponents often ended up dead or maimed; and his charms were believed to protect users from even bullets. Ambitious men of all sorts, such as criminals, politicians, careerists in government and private practice, patronised Okeke for his charms. According to Akwani, this was to the extent that even state military governors in the east at the time did not dare cross Eddy or they would find themselves out of power. People disappeared, people were kidnapped, and people were killed and used for rituals to make the perpetrators even more powerful and invincible.

Psychologically, fear of Okeke and his occult powers was very real and at the beginning, the Bakassi Boys suffered setbacks against their opponents. To counteract that, they had to present themselves as having more power than their opponents. Gradually, they began to succeed. That success was sealed after the capture and public execution of the 'invincible' Okeke. After that, communities in the East began to request the vigilante's help in dealing with any number of criminal menaces (Akwani, 2006, p. 2).

Also writing about the circumstances surrounding the birth and modus operandi of the Bakassi Boys, Nwana states that there is something about the vigilante group, which the police do not like: usurping police functions. This is in the sense that no responsible police force will welcome a situation where their relevance is questioned because of the activities of an ubiquitous body crossing their paths and sometimes moving along parallel lines. He recounts that he was a living witness to the fact that around 1997, life was made unbearable by the callous activities of armed bandits in Imo State. They suddenly seemed to have multiplied so much so that anybody found outdoors after dusk was risking his or her life. Stories of robberies, torture and car snatching filled the air and everybody had an experience to share in these orgies. Nwana states that something intolerable

happened that warranted the community setting up local vigilance units, which were responsible for stemming the rise in crime, identifying the criminals and involving the police at Owerri, Urualla and Okigwe. Before the members knew it, their anonymity was compromised and they were marked for elimination. The activities of the robbery gangs confined royal fathers to their palaces following threats of being killed for identifying with their subjects in the search for a peaceful community. The revelation from investigation was that,

the culprits were local boys and that the police collaboration was part of their strength. All information placed at the disposal of the police about suspected dare devil home based hoodlums were passed on to the men of the underworld. At this stage a voice suggested the engagement of the services of the Bakassi Boys, whose successes in other communities had become remarkable (Nwana, 2000, p.1).

According to Nwana, the Bakassi Boys went to work immediately with a dose of discreteness that allowed them to know their employers and be briefed in detail as to the possible suspects, and until they were perfectly ready, nothing happened. When they eventually went into action, well known hoodlums who were friendly with the police gradually took notice and either fled or stayed at their peril. In a short time, locking and bolting of gates and doors in the village became only a matter of habit as nobody actually needed to. Home became haven again and evening parties and outside engagements returned to the community. Nwana draws conclusions as to the reliability of the Bakassi Boys:

Asked thereafter to choose between the Bakassi Boys and the police, the village folks preferred the former. Information is perhaps the greatest help the police force needs to combat crime. The same applied to the Bakassi Boys. But whereas police informants were betrayed through the flippancy, irresponsibility and criminal intent of the bad eggs in the force, Bakassi Boys did not have that problem or gloat about their successes. They respected informants but still investigated every case

reported (Nwana, 2000, p.1).

Paradoxically, in all three states where the Bakassi Boys operated predominantly – Abia, Anambra, and Imo – they enjoyed the support of their state governments who provided them with offices, uniforms and vehicles, as well as paying their salaries. Their offices and vehicles bore the names, or initials, of the vigilante groups, their inscriptions and sometimes their mottos, making them easily recognisable.

With the realisation that the methods of the Bakassi Boys were sometimes arbitrary and often brutal, the initial relief gradually became tinged with trepidation. Unfortunately, not many persons gathered enough courage to publicly express their indignation at the violence of the Bakassi Boys, probably for fear. It is pertinent to briefly highlight key aspects of their operations in order to appreciate the filmic depiction and interpretation in the *Issakaba* series.

- a) *Human Rights Abuses by the Bakassi Boys*: The Bakassi Boys had been responsible for numerous human rights abuses, which include summary executions, torture, and unlawful detention. First, 43 years old Prophet Eddie Okeke was killed in November 2000, leaving behind a pregnant wife and eight children. It was alleged that he was a criminal who had engaged in assault, extortion, drug dealing, trafficking in children, and ritual killing. Second, Ezeodumegwu G. Okonkwo, a 41 years old chief, who had three wives and eleven children, and was a well respected political figure that openly criticised the high-handedness of powerful figures in his local government area was killed in February 2001. Third, setting themselves up as self-appointed judges, juries and executioners, the Bakassi Boys were said to have killed scores of people after putting them through their own form of trial, resulting in arbitrary decisions as to the individual's guilt or innocence, often on the basis of fabricated evidence extracted under torture, or no evidence at all. They claim to use magic to ascertain whether individuals are guilty or innocent and the premises from which they operate are adorned with symbols and

- objects related to this belief. Fourth, the Bakassi Boys tortured people with the intention of extracting confessions of guilt from supposed suspects. This is because they had actively fuelled the myth that they had magical ways of ascertaining guilt or innocence. An infamous technique is that they would hold a machete over a suspect's bare chest; if the blade of the machete turned red, it meant that the individual was guilty. Incidentally, only the Bakassi Boys could see the change of colour; thus, it was for them alone to decide the guilt or innocence of a suspect (Isaacs, 2002, p. 2).
- b) *Targeting Vocal Critics:* The momentum created by the Bakassi Boys and their apparent popularity created a climate where it was dangerous to denounce or criticise their excesses. They dealt ruthlessly with individuals who dared to criticise or denounce their methods, or refused to make financial contributions to them. It will be recalled that Barnabas Igwe, the chairman of Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Anambra State chapter, and a vocal critic of the government of the day, was assassinated along with his wife, by suspected members of the vigilante group during this period. Though Governor Chinwoke Mbadinuju said he had no hand in the killing of the Igwes, majority of Anambrarians were of the view that he was culpable.
 - c) *Increased Use as Political Tools:* The Bakassi Boys had been used by state governors and their supporters to target perceived political opponents. There were fears that this political use of vigilante groups would be intensified in the run-up to the elections in 2003, and that it could generate other acts of violence on the part of rival candidates and their supporters. The Bakassi Boys had sometimes been used as security guards, including government officials. Governor Chris Ngige, for example, depended on this security outfit when his security details were withdrawn in the heat of the abduction/resignation crisis that rocked Anambra State in 2004.
 - d) *Interventions in Private Disputes and Civil Matters:* In many instances, the Bakassi Boys had been called in as hired

thugs to intervene in private disputes and civil matters, ranging from debt collection and disputes between landlords and tenants, to conflicts over land ownership and even domestic disputes. Landlords hired the Bakassi Boys to evict tenants who they claimed had not paid their rents, or who they wanted to evict for other reasons.

According to the “HRW/CLEEN Report,” between October 27 and 30, 2001, about twenty-seven people were killed after the Bakassi Boys clashed with market traders in Ariaria Market. The incident started when a landlord called in the Bakassi Boys to deal with a tenant, a shoemaker, who allegedly owed him two months’ rent. The Bakassi Boys attacked the tenant with machetes and also assaulted his wife. Consequently, the shoemakers’ union mobilised and complained to them about the ill-treatment of the tenant, and what they received in return was severe beating from the Boys. Also, they abducted at least fifteen traders and apprentices, including some teenagers, at the Powerline Shoe Plaza in Ariaria Market, and took them to their execution ground, known as Burrow Pit. They beheaded them and cut off their genitals and brought their headless corpses back to the Shoe Plaza.

In response, the shoemakers returned to the Bakassi Boys’ headquarters the following day and burned and vandalised their building. They also destroyed part of the residence of the leader, as well as the house of the landlord, whose invitation had sparked off the incident. The Bakassi Boys then confronted the traders and a violent clash ensued. There were casualties on both sides, as both the Bakassi Boys and the shoemakers were armed with guns and machetes. This incident, which took place in Ariaria Market, the birthplace of the Bakassi Boys, illustrates how far the situation had gotten out of control and how the actions of the Bakassi Boys ended up pitting them against their original sponsors, the shoemakers. In other words, the traders had inadvertently created a monster that had gotten bigger and more powerful than the creators, and they needed to stem the trend.

4.6 The Agitation for Regional Police in Nigeria

The fact remains that the Nigeria police have been helpless in the face of the high level of insecurity in the country, occasioned by criminal activities. The phenomenon has necessitated strident calls for regional police in certain quarters. Government has however not succumbed to this, advisedly because of the fear that some sections of the country could use such police force against the Federal Government. It is even instructive that Chris Ngige, erstwhile governor of Anambra State, depended on the Anambra State Vigilante Service for several months, when the then Anambra State Police Commissioner withdrew his security personnel, in compliance with “orders from above.” As it were, with brutality, corruption and extortion, and acting outside the rule of law by the police, among other vices, there have been agitations for the country to embrace the regional police system.

Several legislators have attempted to pass laws that would use OPC’s militant branch as a local southern police force. Due to fears that having a government-sanctioned all-Yoruba force could exacerbate ethnic tensions, these efforts failed (“Odua Peoples’ Congress,” p. 1).

Aluko (1998) also examines the idea of regional structure, advocating the regionalisation of the political administration of the country and the command structure of a united army, which by extension includes the police. According to him, the essence is to grant the regions or geopolitical zones greater autonomy in line with true federalism. Consequently, Aluko suggests the setting up of training facilities in each region that would be open to all Nigerians. In his view, under such arrangement, 80% of the regional armed forces (including the police) will come from the particular zone and 4% each from the other zones.

“Edo Okpamakhin,” a US-based association of Edo State indigenes, had proposed a governmental structure that would guarantee equal treatment for all Nigerians, arguing that the present federal system cannot promote peace, harmony and stability. According to Edo Okpamakhin, the ethnic rivalries

amongst the peoples of Nigeria and the perception of ethnic domination by one ethnic group have all hindered progress and set the whole country back. Edo Okpamakhin thus proposed a Union of Nigeria government system, made up of regions. To the group, each region should be autonomous within the powers of the regions in line with the 1952 and 1954 Constitutions, and with all privileges and rights to secede from the Union if at least 60 percent of its electorate so agree through a referendum. As regards the issue of policing and the police force, the group recommended, among others, that,

R13. Each Region should have a reservoir of National Guard; and the National Guard should be the militia of the Region or State.

R14. Disband the National Police Force as presently constituted and form Regional, State, County, Semi-Autonomous Territory and local government police forces under their respective territorial authorities, and a Union Bureau of Investigation (UBI) similar to the United States of America Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) ("The Structure," 1998, p. 7).

Under the recommendations, Edo Okpamakhin hoped to see the role of the federal government reduced in favour of the regional, state, and local governments. They thus opined that this was a veritable approach to sustaining peace and stability in the constituent parts of the country.

In the face of several political assassinations in the country, a press release by the National Association of Seadogs (NAS) expressed concern, like many other Nigerians, saying that the Nigeria Police Force has not resolved any of the killings. It observed that this inability amounts to a colossal failure of police duties and thus aligns with the clamour for community-based policing as is the case in other successful nations. The statement maintained that the call for state-owned police was not out of place, based on the reality on ground:

With this crass ineptitude of the centrally controlled police, the need for devolution of the police apparatus has become imperative. There is need for a grass root

policing of lives and property. Police reform should top the agenda of the various political parties jostling for political and economic power (Makanju, 2006, p. 1).

The National Association of Seadogs was of the view that this burden weighs so much on poor Nigerian citizens who were legally precluded from protecting themselves and at the same time stuck with the absence of an effective police force. The Nigerian Police continue to shout wolf in respect of community and state-owned vigilante outfits when the same police were almost always found wanting whenever they were put to test. The association thus opined that Nigerians should decide via a referendum what to do with the current and failed centrally-controlled NPF. It submitted that the Nigerian Police Force was certainly a failed experiment (Makanju, 2006, p.3).

In a related development, while condemning the brutal assassination of politicians of Yoruba extraction, like Bola Ige, Funso Williams, and Bayo Daramola, among others in the country, Egbe Omo Yoruba, a national association of Yoruba descendants in North America, USA and Canada, also called for the decentralisation of the police force.

There is dire need for the decentralisation of the Nigerian Police and the creation of States' or regional police to ensure that the basic constitutional right of every Nigerian to live in peace and safety is assured (Egbe Omo, 2006, p. 4).

While the ruling government has rebuffed calls for the regionalisation of the Nigeria Police, which was a key issue in the calls for resource control or a Sovereign National Conference (SNC), especially from ethnic nationalities from the Niger Delta, the fact remains that vigilantes and ethnic militias would constitute a key factor in the political development of the country. Babawale provides a background to this phenomenon when he observes that the groups evolved as,

a form of reaction to the failure of the Nigerian state, the lack of equity in its distribution of power resources and the absence of social justice in its relationship with its constituents. The formation of ethnic militias

constitutes a vote of no confidence in the Nigerian state (Babawale, 2002, p. 8).

It is thus not surprising that among his recommendations, he advocates for “restructuring the polity in such a way that the military and police would be divided into zonal formations” (p. 10).

In conclusion whether the hard stance of the federal government against these agitations would be relaxed or not would depend, to a large extent, on the effective policing of the country by the Nigeria Police Force, and the reduction in the influence of the various vigilante or ethnic militia groups. Somehow, the failure of the policing system in Nigeria has been portrayed in different dimensions in Nigerian films that fall under the crime/gangster genre. Examples include *Sergeant Okoro*, *Issakaba*, *Police Officer*, *Executive Crime*, *Broad Daylight*, and *State of Emergency*, just to mention a few. The work selected for critical analysis is *Issakaba*, a four-part film, produced by Chukwuka Emelionwu and Moses Nnam, and directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen.

4.7 A Critical Reading of the *Issakaba* Series

The title of the film, *Issakaba*, is a parody on the Bakassi Boys, in the sense that, if the last letter, “a” is removed from the title and it is read in the reverse order, what we have actually is, “Bakassi.” The film, *Issakaba*, is a tale of poetic justice inspired by the phenomenon of vigilantism, which became the order of the day in Nigeria, going back especially to the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections. This was when Chief MKO Abiola, the perceived winner of the elections, was not allowed to take up the leadership of the country and people became disenchanted. Eventually, President Ibrahim Babangida was forced out of office as he, in his words, “stepped aside,” after foisting an Interim National Government (ING) on the country under the headship of Chief Ernest Shonekan. Unfortunately, Gen. Sani Abacha, whom Babangida had left behind as part of the ING, pushed out Shonekan and took over power on November 17, 1994. All of these built up tension and every facet of society experienced wrath, which necessitated public and private institutions to police their own vicinity, a kind of

neighbourhood watch. It can be posited that this was the scenario that inspired the *Issakaba* series. The full stories of what happened in Aba, Onitsha, and other cities in the eastern part of the country have been highlighted in the background study on the Bakassi Boys.

The first of the *Issakaba* series, titled, *Issakaba*, begins with Ebube (Sam Dede) and a busload of machete-wielding boys driving into town, breaking all kinds of traffic rules. They reverse suddenly, come down from the bus and Ebube decapitates a roadside blind beggar. When he is challenged by Chief Odiwe (Chiwetalu Agu) who later turns out to be their guide, Ebube avers that Issakaba does not shed innocent blood and proves that the armed robbers, who terrorise the town, get their supplies of guns from the blind beggar. Of course, when Nwoke (Michael Ogundu) checks through what he (the beggar) was sitting on, he finds out that there are pistols hidden there, which actually means that the beggar was a dispenser of weapons to robbers. The opening sequence is almost like an opening glee.

In another sequence, it is discovered that a seemingly innocent maize seller, Mama Chinwe (Ada Ugah), is another source of dispensing weapons to robbers. In her line of business, she sells maize and pears but secretly sells guns (maize) and bullets (pears). Some boys patronise her and use the weapons to execute an armed robbery in the village, carting away a Ghana-Must-Go (GMG) bag containing money. Thereafter, the Issakaba are received in town and the story switches to the Igwe's palace, where there is a debate as to whether Issakaba should actually be called in to save the situation. Notable among the chiefs in court with the Igwe (Amaechi Muonagor) is Chief Mbanefo (Pete Eneh), who volunteers to fund the invitation of Issakaba to the community. He pledges the sum of two million naira and a Mercedes Benz car to facilitate the activities of the boys, thus generally footing the bill for their operations. Subsequently, Issakaba comes into town and Ebube tells them that they (the Issakaba) would not spare anybody, no matter how highly placed the person may be in the community. He stresses that with the proverb, "The river does not flow through the forest without first bringing down trees," meaning, the source

of their problem may be among the people in the council of chiefs. The implication, therefore, is that many highly placed persons may be affected by the cleansing exercise of Issakaba.

At the police station, a woman (Victoria Okolie) reports the theft of her car. Sadly, the policemen on duty (Victor Okereke and Richard Ogbonna) ignore her, rather concentrating on pools betting because, to them, the theft of a car was not new in a crime-infested society. Ironically, the entrance of the Divisional Police Officer, Idoko (Tom Njemanze) does not change anything as he tells her that the police were ill-equipped to face the superior firepower of the menacing and rampaging armed robbers. According to him, he had just two rounds of ammunition in his pistol, and does not want to commit suicide by confronting armed robbers. The police however get some vital information that the woman had lost money to the tune of ten thousand naira and jewelry worth one hundred thousand naira in the said robbery incident. To the woman's dismay, she is asked to check back in two weeks' time. It is also revealed at this point that the police officers aid and abet the armed robbers; thus, there is unease everywhere when the Issakaba boys come into town.

The warning of Ebube that, "the river does not flow through the forest without first bringing down trees," is better illustrated by the fact that the first armed robber the Issakaba apprehend is Chief Odogwu's son (Sunny Alor). Though there are protests from the parents that the boy is innocent, the Issakaba make him to confess all the blood-chilling evil deeds through a charm which they put around his neck. The menace of armed robberies continues but the Issakaba boys are equal to the task. They reach the scene of one of such robberies and one of the armed robbers is not lucky in his escape bid. He tries to display his supernatural powers by vanishing; but the Issakaba boys force him back and he is made to face instant justice. This creates panic in the gang and the leader, Danga (Andy Chukwu), also known as, "the terror of the night," goes to a native doctor, Ikuku (Zulu Adigwe), for fortification against machete cuts since that is what the Issakaba use. Apparently, the men of the underworld had realised that the fear of Issakaba was the

beginning of wisdom. Somehow, Chief Mbanefo (Pete Ene) and some chiefs are incensed by the Issakaba's killing of Chief Odogwu's son, arguing that the boys should leave the community to forestall further killings. They maintain that if left unchecked, the group will be killing more innocent young blood and perceived opponents in the guise of robbers.

In a sequence that follows at the shrine of Ikuku, the members of Danga's robbery gang drink a concoction so that they would be fortified against machete cuts, especially from the Issakaba. They test the efficacy of the charm, happy that they are now ready for serious business. Nonetheless, the acquisition of such a charm is not without certain precautions as they are warned by the medicine man:

IKUKU: Only you can stop yourselves; there are certain rules you have to obey for it to be effective ... You must not sleep with a woman; and you must not drink any liquid; then it will be effective ... It will wear out after three weeks ...

In another sequence, Ebube tells Chief Odiwe that the role of Issakaba is to complement the crime prevention measures because the police alone cannot keep the peace. In his view, poverty, illiteracy and inadequate mobilisation of the police are some of the causes of the high crime rate in the society. He posits that somebody in high places is gaining from the inadequacy of the police which may explain why they (the police) were not well maintained. Ebube eventually senses that men of the underworld are at work and the Issakaba go to the venue of the operation and arrest the culprits. The gang leader, Danga, boasts of his indestructibility because of the charm they had acquired; but he realises too late that the Issakaba boys know the antidote to such invincibility. Ebube orders one of his boys to give him a drink, urinating into his mouth, a traditional way of neutralising the efficacy of charms.

Back in the camp, Ebube has a premonition that all was not well and that something bad was about to happen. He assembles the boys and discovers that Ndukwe had left the camp in utter disregard of his injunction that they should remain close at all times. He orders Nwoke (Michael Ogundu) to carry out a test

on the remaining boys and finds out that all of them are clean. Meanwhile, Ndukwe is seen strolling round town with a girl when a bus drives by and the occupants abduct him. This is more of a revenge mission by members of the robbery gang who were aggrieved that the Issakaba had spoilt the business of armed robbery for them in the community. Eventually, the dead body of Ndukwe is found at a roadside.

In the palace, Ebube argues that the robbers who terrorise the town are being sponsored by people who do not like the presence of Issakaba and vows that he will find out the culprits and bring them to justice. The Igwe gives him the permission to deal with any person who is involved in criminal activities, either as a sponsor or as an armed robber. In going down memory lane to recall how the Issakaba business began, Ebube says that, “the danger in hunting down evil is that you gradually become that which you seek to destroy.” He recalls that the vigilante activities all started in Ayaba, at a time when people lived in mortal fear because of the menace of armed robbers. For many families, every night was like living in hell and this affected the traders more as well as their customers. According to him, everything came to a head one morning when one of their biggest customers was killed and the sum of three million naira taken from her. That day, the traders decided to fight for their businesses to save their lives and to end the menace of armed robbery. The streets of Ayaba were painted red that morning as 72 known armed robbers were killed and it gave rise to what has come to be known as “Issakaba.”

Meanwhile, the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) Idoko (Tom Njemanze) visits Chief Mbanefo to express fear over the activities of Issakaba. Eventually, Issakaba storms his (DPO’s) residence the next morning suspecting that he stockpiles arms and ammunition which he supplies to armed robbers. Seeing that the bullets his son fires at the Issakaba boys do not penetrate them, he confesses that the guns belonged to Chief Mbanefo and that he was only a middleman. With the arrest of Idoko, Chief Mbanefo realises that the noose is getting tighter; so, he offers Chief Odiwe the sum of one hundred thousand naira so that he could recruit towards the formation of an alternative

Issakaba. He says that he is worried that his enemies may have told the Issakaba negative stories about him, and tacitly advocates the formation of a new group which would acquire some of the powers that the Issakaba had. To his chagrin, Chief Odiwe rejects the bribe. Consequently, the Issakaba and Chief Odiwe plot to stop the influence of “chairman,” who is suspected to be behind all the robberies in town, and Ikuku who gives protective charms to the armed robbers.

Chief Odiwe returns home, as the story progresses, only to find that his wife and baby have been kidnapped. Just as he is reporting the kidnap to the Issakaba, there is an attack on the camp. The Issakaba pursue their attackers and apprehend one of the survivors, who happens to be Osita (Uche Ndigwe), the last son of the Igwe. The boy confesses that the attack was masterminded by Chief Mbanefo, the so-called “chairman.” At the palace, the Igwe maintains that justice has to be done in line with the words of Ebube that, “A river does not flow through the forest without bringing down trees.” The Issakaba eventually arrest Chief Mbanefo and storm Ikuku’s house to effect his arrest, but they cannot as he vanishes. On their return to the camp, the Issakaba wonder why Ikuku is a hard nut to crack. To forestall further disappointments, Ebube consults a medicine man and gets a charm that would neutralise the powers of Ikuku. Consequently, the Issakaba boys storm Ikuku’s house and end his vanishing acts by dropping the charm which makes him powerless. Having captured Ikuku, Issakaba feels that the time has come for the group to go back to base. The question that eventually crosses one’s mind is whether that would actually be the end to criminal activities in the community.

However, there are several of the integral highlights that need to be taken note of in this story because they are quite symbolic. First, there is Danga and his source of supernatural power, which happens to be Ikuku. It is common knowledge that most people in many cities or communities in Nigeria know the double standard these medicine men play. They claim to have powers over all kinds of ailments; also, they claim to have all forms of curative powers, even the power to cure the much dreaded Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), and

so on. Unknown to many, they are the ones that actually aid and abet most armed robberies within the society. From the way the character of Ikuku is portrayed, it is not just a phantom character; these are characters that can be easily recognised in our communities. Based on various symbolic aspects of this story, it can be argued that the character of Ikuku seems to contain a lot of ambivalences. For instance, it is noticed that in the first confrontation the Issakaba boys have with him, he has the upper hand. When they drive into his compound for the final confrontation, the shot is taken from a high angle. Ebube and his boys are quite diminished in height and when they come in, the confrontation ends in his favour.

Furthermore, Ikuku is seen dressed up totally in red, signifying a dangerous personality within the community; and that symbolises his being the source of most of the blood-letting in that community. In the confrontation within his house, it is observed that there are various paraphernalia, which include some sculptural pieces denoting people in various sculptural postures, not of the relief that is found with people who are happy, but of people who seem to be in agony. This is very significant when the film is looked at critically because one of them looks very muscular; but that muscular force is not put to any utilitarian purpose. The sculptural piece seems to be depicting a builder exhibiting his muscles which is a symbolic link with the characterisation of Ikuku. He has power, but that power is being used negatively within the community and not for curative purposes.

It is also worth noting that in the confrontation the Issakaba boys have with Ikuku, there are various scenes with disappearing acts which cannot be explained rationally. Incidentally, this is one of the things that run through the whole of the *Issakaba* series. The whole idea of a human being dematerialising is something which needs to be looked at in the light of the African metaphysical belief systems. The pertinent question is whether it is actually possible for a human being to dematerialise or disappear. These are some of the beliefs people still hold on to, for which there are no rational explanations in terms of modern scientific reasoning. The producers have built upon such belief

systems and exploited it in the film. For instance, people believe that there are medicines that make it impossible for a machete to cut a human body. It is believed that there are certain medicinal herbs that one can take through incision which can make the body impenetrable to high velocity bullets. Again, people believe that there are some medicines that make somebody to dematerialise through vanishing acts such that people cannot see the person again. These are the metaphysical thoughts upon which the producers have anchored their stories. Like it has been stated earlier, these are things that cannot be subjected to scientific proof and, in any case, the fact is that such stories are there and the producers have anchored their story on it.

Similarly, there are also several ambivalences in the second confrontation between Ebube and Ikuku. It has been noted that Ikuku himself is totally dressed in pure white, signifying spiritual purity in African belief system. It is ironic that a wicked man of his nature is being costumed in this purified form when he is an embodiment of evil. He is wearing bead with a single cowry on his forehead with a black hat. Interestingly, it is also noticed that the hat is not a traditional African hat but seems almost like an Indian kind of headgear. This is probably a representation of the fact thattrado-medical practitioners take pride in going for apprenticeship in India and reflect this in their costumes and accessories as well as incantations. On the other hand are the forces of poetic justice led by Ebube and his men. Ebube is dressed in black and wears a white face cap which shows that the whole story is full of ambivalences and contradictions. This anomaly, which is largely because there is very little sensitivity to the use of colour, as extensively examined earlier, can be attributed to the production context in Nollywood, where directors are almost always in a hurry to shoot films. There is no gainsaying the fact that colour is supposed to symbolise a lot on which to anchor the subtext of a story. Here, it is creating a lot of contradictions and ambivalences rather than helping to advance the movement of the story.

It will also be noticed that the use of proverbs in the film is very symbolic. It would be recalled that when Ebube and his

boys first come into the palace, he says, “A river does not flow through the forest, without bringing down trees.” Ironically, that is exactly what happens in the course of the story because a lot of “trees” are brought down, and a lot of them are very prominent sons of the community. Most of the prominent sons are brought down because they are actually instrumental to the numerous armed robberies that had been plaguing the community. The cases include the son of Chief Odogwu, Chief Mbanefo, the DPO and his son, and the son of the Igwe himself. Unfortunately, the Igwe’s wife pleads that the Igwe should use his power to exonerate their son though it had been proven that the boy was an armed robbery kingpin; but he does not shift grounds. This is contrary to the typical Nigerian mentality of leaders telling their subjects, “Do what I say, but not what I do.” Here is an upright leader who refuses to listen to his wife and says if a child has committed a crime and the community had agreed on a particular kind of punishment for such crimes, then the child should be made to face the music.

On the other hand, the issue of people not listening to their leaders is portrayed. Ebube had warned his boys that they should not defile themselves, and that one thing they were not expected to indulge in was going out with women prior to any operation. Again, this aspect is also rooted in African belief system because in the olden days, at least in Urhobo and Ijaw traditions, warriors were not allowed to eat snails or raw palm fruits, or any food prepared by a woman under her menstrual period, sleep with women, and so on, before going to war, so that they would not be vulnerable to enemy attacks. The reason for not eating snails or raw palm fruits is that all of these are supposed to be items which are used to prepare concoctions that make it possible for people to supposedly dematerialise or vanish, so to speak, to make them impenetrable to spears, machetes, bullets, and so on. Here, the boys had been warned that they should not move with women within the period of active service to avoid being defiled. Understandably, the consequence for one of them, Ndukwe, who violates this law is that he pays dearly with his life.

There is also an aspect concerning the accommodation provided for Ebube and his boys which needs to be given attention in this analysis. In the first place, it will be noticed that the architectural layout is quite fundamental. The ground floor of the building is painted red, signifying the fact that people who are operating from the building themselves constitute a source of danger. It can also be said that on the long run, in their line of business, the hunter becomes the hunted. This explains why for providing the Issakaba guidance within the village, Chief Odiwe's wife and child are kidnapped. Some of the contradictions that have been noted, with reference to Ikuku, as regard the symbolic costumes he is provided and the Issakaba boys, when they clashed, do not obtain here. As a point of fact, one can take a symbolic analysis of the aspect from which they are operating. It can be observed that they are strangers and are living on the edge of society or the edge of life. They could be killed at any moment and they are also capable of killing people, all in the line of duty. Furthermore, on top of the building, there is an imposing painting of Jesus Christ, which is not fortuitous in the film. In the Christian faith, Christ is the messiah, who came to save the world, through the redemption of the sins of man. Symbolically, in *Issakaba*, Ebube and his boys play a messianic role in that they have sacrificed their peace of mind and their lives; they have abandoned their wives and families to come to a strange land in order to redeem them from the menace of armed robbery. This informs Ikenka's statement that the day the boys chose Issakaba, that was the day they decided to lose their freedom.

It is possible also that most of these things may have been done unconsciously because it may never have really occurred to the producers that there is an emblematic painting of Christ on the building where the Issakaba boys are lodged. On the other hand, many of the criminals, the chiefs, whose children are caught aiding armed robbery in the community, also have religious symbols on their doors or walls. When Ebube and his boys went to confront the DPO, there is a cross right on his door. These ambivalent symbolic representations are also replicated in *Issakaba 2* because when they go to confront Chief

Edwin, the cross is seen on the door behind him. This is reflective of the social order in the sense that most people pretend to be Christians; but that is mainly a smokescreen for them to cover up their nefarious activities.

It is imperative to take the symbolic analysis to the level of the tree, especially in the compound where the Issakaba boys are camped. This is significant in that in most African communities, these are places where ancestral things are retained, thus making them more like community shrines where people gather. For example, this was the place where Ebube tells their guide, Chief Odiwe, how the vigilante group came about. The role the boys play is messianic since they could be killed without any form of compensation from anybody. They are neither under the pay of government nor the community because the community only provides them transportation and probably some money for feeding, which apparently have no impact on their families.

In terms of dramaturgy, while *Issakaba* deals with the issue of armed robbery, *Issakaba 2* focuses predominantly upon ritual killings in the Nigerian society. The opening sequence begins with robbers disguised as Pentecostal preachers in a commuter bus. Incidentally, this is something which is very common in most inter and intra-city transportation services in Nigeria. Thus, it could be said that most of the stories are really based on true-life experiences, which people have narrated for screen writers to develop as movie scripts. Like a typical luxurious bus robbery, *Issakaba 2* begins with “a man of God” and some boys disguised as preachers of the word of God in a commuter bus. Unknown to fellow commuters in the bus, they are in for what is popularly called ‘one chance’ robbers. Somewhere along the way, the gang members stop the bus and dispossess all the commuters of their belongings and escape in a get-away car. The story actually begins with natives of Oshata complaining to their Igwe as regards the several inexplicable ritual killings within the community, and the Igwe seems not to have been doing anything about it. Out of frustration, the villagers bring the last victim of ritual killing to his palace to motivate him into action. Amazuru (John Okafor), the younger brother of the

last victim, is sent to help recruit the Issakaba boys to solve the riddles of ritual killings going on within the community.

In the next sequence at the Issakaba base, Amazuru presents the letter of request to Ebube but he protests to the leader, Ikenka (Chudi Kashimawo), that the boys needed to rest and that they had left their families for long. Their leader replies that anyone who signs to be part of Issakaba knows that they are meant to make a lot of sacrifices on behalf of the community that they are serving. When they arrive the community, they are received by the Igwe-in-council; but Ebube repeats the same proverb which he said in the first film in the series that, "The river does not flow through the forest, without first bringing down trees." The implication of this is that like what is seen in *Issakaba*, majority of the crimes in Oshata were committed by people within the community. It is also of interest that the Igwe says that he does not mind if such persons were brought to book. Ebube tells him that even though he is quite enthusiastic, saying that he wants such persons to be brought to book, it may turn out that these are very prominent chiefs whom he may consider untouchable. The Igwe reassures him that the Issakaba could go ahead, and that they have the support of the palace.

Thereafter, one of the prominent chiefs in town, Chief Edwin (Ejike Asiegbu), goes to the shrine of Igbugu for the medicine man (Columbus Iriisoanga) to help revive his ailing business. Chief Edwin realises that his friend, who had come to the shrine of Igbugu, was prospering so he wants to follow his friend's footsteps. Also, very much like the precondition Andy faced in *Living in Bondage* (Vic Mordi, 1992), Edwin is told that he must sacrifice three virgins before his business can prosper all over again. He eventually pays some boys in the community, who are probably unemployed and see the contract as a quick way of getting some cash in their pockets. They kidnap three young maidens who had gone to fetch water from the stream.

In the palace of the Igwe, while they are trying to get details of what is happening, various groups of people arrive to complain about the happenings in their respective families. The first set of people is those persons whose daughters were missing; unknown to them, the girls had been kidnapped for

ritual purposes. This is followed by the woman who complains that her husband went to the farm the previous day and had not come back. The brother who had killed him pretentiously says that the Igwe should find solution to the crime; but Ebube tells him that he knows who killed his brother. He disputes it but with the aid of the Issakaba necklace charm, he confesses that he actually killed his own brother. Ebube metes out instant justice by giving him an Issakaba short-sleeve treatment on the left hand – amputating him near the shoulder.

The most important aspect of *Issakaba 2* is the confrontation between Ikenka and Igbudu. It is worth noting that after the Issakaba had unraveled the murder of Wilberforce, the next crime they attempt to solve is that of the missing maidens. Ebube is able to understand that the girls may have been kidnapped when they went to the river because he puts his charm on the water and asks whether there is any Chief Edwin in the community. With the guidance of Amazuru, the Issakaba boys eventually arrest Chief Edwin, who confesses his crimes and leads them to the shrine of Igbudu for the final confrontation. Somehow, Ebube cannot withstand Igbudu, which necessitates Ikenka coming to the rescue of the Issakaba in the shrine. At the climax of the confrontation, Ikenka tells Ebube that it is time for the big masquerade to enter the arena, and that Ebube should make the acolytes to go to sleep so that they would not see what would ensue. What happens is that the supposed crippled man gets up from the wheelchair, going through a process of energising, followed by ferretting Igbudu out from his hiding place in his shrine. He then tells Ebube and his boys to go after Igbudu as he also dematerialises and reappears. Finally, when Igbudu changes into a big stone, they grab him immediately and one of the boys urinates on the stone, as a way of demystifying him. Igbudu is consequently dispossessed of all his powers and he is brought before Ikenka in a hypnotised form.

Ironically, the act of going to fetch water in the stream brings to the fore the question of underdevelopment in many suburban communities in Nigeria because in terms of social responsibility, this is a community which should ideally have

potable drinking water. Unfortunately, this is not the case as we find that the people suffer deprivation and have to go to the stream to fetch water, wash, or bathe. Another aspect of the story deals with the issue of land ownership and dispute as it is traditional in African societies. Some people believe that African land is open to ownership by everybody which is not true. The land ownership system is based on family holdings; and from the family it runs down to the whole community. The head of the family disposes the land, as he deems fit, being the most senior male child of the family. In the film, the issue of a land left behind by a late father for two sons becomes the source of conflict and tragedy in the family. In the film, the eldest son believes that he owns the land, and that his younger brother has no right to farm on it. The first son had been given his own portion of the land and the younger son was farming his land; but the first son comes to confront his younger brother who was farming his own inheritance. Apparently, the senior brother wants to have the whole land alone out of greed and brutally kills his younger brother. Thereafter, he pretentiously goes home to say that maybe he might have been a victim of an unexplained ritual murder. Predictably, all of these things are riddles which are later solved by Ebube and his boys.

Perhaps at this point, it is necessary to state that the narrative structure of *Issakaba* and *Issakaba 2* is similar. The community that is represented here is an urban one; normally, there would have been a police station, with possibly, a DPO. It is expected that the DPO is the one to whom complaints should have been taken. Ideally, once complaints are brought to the doorstep of the regular policing system, it is their place to send officers of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to go and find out those responsible for such ritual murders in the community. Paradoxically, the people here would not follow that modern method of solving the mysteries of such unwholesome acts. They resort to the traditional method of going to invite people who, supposedly, have metaphysical means of explaining the nefarious activities going on in the community. It does not occur to the Igwe to go to the police because he has lost faith in them. He believes the policing system would not give him any favourable

answer; and so, he goes to the other extreme end of using traditional means of dispensing justice in the face of the multifarious criminal activities. This is a situation where irrationality is made to replace rational approaches to doing things. Of course, when the Issakaba boys come to the rescue, their coming coincides with the robbers who have just robbed commuters. The robbers come to a place where they are going to rest, and probably share their booty, when they are confronted and eventually apprehended. What happens to the robbers thereafter is not clearly stated; but it is presumed that they are subjected to extrajudicial killing.

In both films, the Issakaba boys dispense justice without investigation. The method of investigation is not rationally followed through in the sense of interrogating the criminals and finding out what was responsible for their activities. What is done is an absurd method of just hanging a cowry-beaded necklace charm on the neck of supposed suspects and they begin to confess their sins. This is an aspect of the film which is very retrogressive because in a modern urban city, it is expected that criminal investigators from the policing system would be brought in to investigate the mystery behind the killings within the community. As it has been earlier noted, Nigerians are still very much a hybrid people in the sense of being still dipped in traditional African belief systems while at the same time enjoying the fruits of modern technological advancement. Furthermore, it cannot be rationally explained how a human being can be turned into a machine that dispenses cash to people. The purpose for which Chief Edwin pays boys to kidnap three maidens is for him to use, or rather, turn them into money dispensers. It is believed that when the spirit of the lady is invoked, the body will begin to vomit raw cash for him, which will then form the foundation of his new-found wealth. There is no doubt that he will go to display this ill-gotten wealth within the community and be applauded. This is because society so applauds ostentatious living to the extent that ill-gotten wealth is not questioned by the public. Such affluent persons are quick to donate huge sums of money at public functions, become chief launchers at fund-raising ceremonies, buy chieftaincy

titles, acquire questionable honorary doctorate degrees, and marry more wives.

While it is true that there are several aspects of *Issakaba 2* that cannot be subjected to rational scientific analysis, an examination of the context within which the Bakassi boys emerged reveals that several irrational powers were attributed to them. The aspect of invincibility and the ability of the Bakassi boys to detect crimes were believed by the people. People had faith in the ability of the Bakassi boys to contain crime since they were believed to possess supernatural powers; so, as far as communities where concerned, the police can go to hell. For example, Nwoke puts a knife to suspects' chests and it is only the Issakaba boys who hold the machete that know whether it has turned red or not. Unarguably, these are irrational, arbitrary and extrajudicial means of extracting information or confessions from criminals, and they are not methods that can be scientifically put to test. It is understandable that people believe in them because traditional African religion still subsists within the psyche of most modern Africans. It also explains why Africans would believe that somebody who is living a wretched life in a ramshackle hut in a forest can make the other man, who is already rich and living in a mansion, richer. The rational argument should have been that if a poor medicine man can make another person rich, then he has no excuse for not making himself rich first. This is because there is no sense in his making a rich man richer so that he can go and build bigger mansions. Ironically, in the film, the medicine man, Igbudu, lives a very wretched, crude, and primitive life in the forest; while Chief Edwin, who is an epitome of success, wearing very expensive clothings, goes to meet him to be enriched. That Chief Edwin descends so low shows his low mentality because he does not use his head to acquire wealth; rather, he thinks that somebody else can make him richer. The truth is that many people in the larger Nigerian society believe that such things do obtain and are ready to try. The *gbomogbomo* syndrome (the kidnap gang within the society), for instance, is based on this odious practice where people are kidnapped and used for rituals.

The above phenomenon is something which the Nigerian

Police Force have not been able to rationally explain. There are hardly authentic records of the police having entered a secret chamber and seeing money being vomited all over the place by a victim of ritual killing. It remains to be established whether sociologists have carried out some kind of sociological study where it is proven that certain persons in some communities have certain rooms, full of money, vomited by people who have been turned into money-minting zombies. Put simply, these are just fantastic stories which are apparently beyond rational explanations. The fact that they are occurring, or the fact that people still kill people and extract their genitals and other vital body parts for money-making rituals means that there must be some kind of inexplicable aspect which needs further investigation. It has been noted that the only possible way to rationalise these developments is that Nigerians are a hybrid people still very much enmeshed in traditional beliefs though living in a modern age. Consequently, script writers, still being very much steeped in traditional beliefs, exploit such beliefs as part and parcel of the elements of the stories which they are writing. Hence, in *Issakaba*, there is no conscious attempt to reform the policing system; rather, it is used as an excuse for moving into what could be categorised as a realm of fantasy.

The representation of the confrontation between Ikenka and Igbudu is of interest to us for other reasons. Ikenka, who is supposed to be a cripple dematerialises from his house and appears in the shrine of Igbudu. It is fascinating that he does not disappear alone and appear in the shrine to sit on the ground; he disappears and reappears in Igbudu's shrine with his modern contraption – the wheel chair. This, no doubt, is beyond rational explanation, which affirms the fact that the producer is just exploiting traditional African belief systems. For instance, at the point where Ebube and Igbudu are fighting, there is a cut to the Igwe's palace where the Igwe wants to put his left foot down and the place collapses under his feet. In African belief system, this is a bad omen, indicating that there is something going wrong somewhere at that particular time. That is also the point at which Ikenka gets the same feeling and quickly vanishes to meet the Issakaba boys at the shrine to take over

the battle. In essence, the point being made here is that the whole story of *Issakaba 2* is also anchored on African belief systems, in the sense that most aspects of the story cannot be rationally explained. Furthermore, the macabre way of dispensing justice is something which cannot be accepted in a modern society. A man cannot, with impunity, decapitate people's hands without subjecting such criminals to due judicial process. If such macabre justice was once used before the Fourth Republic in 1999, then it shows the level of anarchy the Nigerian society had fallen into. There is however a moment of respite, as many of the ethnic militia groups are currently being brought under control.

The belief that urine has some spiritual force is represented symbolically in *Issakaba* and *Issakaba 2*. It is believed that if a person urinates on any charm, it would lose its efficacy because its supernatural powers would then be neutralised. This appears to be the underlying factor in the acts of urinating into the mouth of Danga in *Issakaba* and Igbudu in *Issakaba 2*. In the last sequence, Igbudu turns to a stone and flies at Ebube and the two boys who go after him; they jump away and the stone lands by the shoreline of the little stream. Ebube swiftly puts the Issakaba necklace charm on it and tells Nwoke to quickly urinate on it, which he does; and they celebrate victory over Igbudu. This action is a replication of the process of neutralising the powers of Danga, the terror of the night, in the first part of the film. It would be recalled that Danga had boasted of his invincibility but becomes apprehensive when Ebube orders Ode-eshe to give him a drink. As Ode-eshe starts urinating into his mouth, it becomes apparent that it is all over for Danga because Ikuku has warned that if the charm is to remain effective, then he had to avoid drinking any liquid.

There is also another interesting aspect in the confrontation because as Igbudu vanishes, he is turned into a stone. If one goes into the Ariaria Market in Aba, or the Onitsha Main Market, one will always see all kinds of calendars bearing tales of people who had turned into vultures which they claim are real-life stories. Coincidentally, such stories of people who had turned to vultures started circulating during the time when the fiery

environmental crusader, Ken Saro-Wiwa, was detained and hanged by the government of Gen. Sani Abacha. It will be recalled that one of the things that brought about the confrontation that led to the hanging of Saro-Wiwa was because Ogoni youths had categorised some chiefs, who had been allegedly collaborating with the multinational oil companies and government, as vultures. They were so branded because they were seen as people who had become so greedy, becoming vultures that fed on the carcass and on the poverty of their people. After a while, smart businessmen built some kind of cult image out of the Ogoni crisis and printed calendars, spreading the rumour that some people who had gone for money-making rituals somewhere had turned into vultures and could not change back to human form again. They authenticated such stories by printing pictures of vultures with human heads. Most likely, they must have contracted photographers to snap vultures and engrafted human heads on them digitally and put up such productions on sale to the public. Surprisingly, the calendars sold and people swore that they saw the vultures even when they never saw such a scenario.

The truth is that in all of these, there were many questions begging for plausible answers. For example, have we seen any policeman who witnessed or investigated such occurrences? Which policeman wrote the report that was published even in the newspapers? Incidentally, nobody seems to trace the origin of such stories and the implication is that they happen to be the kind of fabulous tales that interest children. At least, people wonder at those kinds of stories because nobody has told them, and people go to buy such calendars. The bottom line for all of this is that the initiators of such stories make millions of naira from such productions. There is no doubt that mercantile people exploited the ignorance of the citizenry, using it to facilitate their economic agenda. In our background study, it was stated that, as a vigilante movement, the Bakassi boys attempted to fill a gap initially and were allowed to operate unhindered by the regular police force. Later on, the group was used as an instrument of vendetta, especially by politicians who started exploiting it against perceived enemies. It came to a point where

anybody could use the group as an instrument of vengeance by paying to exterminate persons on hit lists. This explains why Chief Mbanefo attempted to bribe Chief Odiwe with the sum of one hundred thousand naira. The reason is that he was afraid that Issakaba had become very powerful in the community and that certain people may just accuse him wrongly. Like every other system produced by social realities, Issakaba is a product of the failure of the policing system, and the most rational thing would have been to reform the police force. As it is in the larger Nigerian society, this was not done in the story. Rather, the story takes twists and turns, and goes into the realm of fantasy which does not seem to provide any rational explanation.

In terms of classification, *Issakaba 2* is in the same crime story category. Of course, the process of investigation is mystified as the screen writer and the director resorted to an irrational method of explaining the kidnappings, the ritual murders, and so on that had taken place within the community. In the confrontation in *Issakaba*, Ikuku vanishes when Ebube and the boys attempt to arrest him. This vanishing act is replicated in *Issakaba 2*, as Igbudu does same. This is a reflection of the trend in Nollywood, where there is the general belief that the more disappearing acts incorporated in a film, or the more viewers see flying objects, the better such a film would sell. This boils down to exploiting the ignorance or gullibility of the viewing public as observed in the case of calendars showing human beings turning into vultures. This underpins the view of Shaka (2004) that no matter how educated the African is, somewhere, lying within the recesses of his psyche, there is that African in him that seems to believe in some kind of magic. Most Europeans have moved beyond this kind of mentality built on skepticism, in the sense that some Europeans would want to find out the cause and effect of a mysterious event, even if one person had died in the process of trying to explicate that phenomenon. As a point of fact, if there are speculations that there is mammy water in the confluence of the River Nun, the white man would like to go and find out. If peradventure he dies, another one would want to go and find out what is there, and what actually

led to the death of the first researcher. In the Nigerian experience, people would discourage such adventurer, asking if he does not like his wife and children. This may be a likely explanation for an Izon proverb that, “*Dau ba de wari abubo, bain buo ka ake buo emi*,” meaning, “the house that had killed one’s father is always passed with running steps.” In other words, rather than investigating what killed your father, you run away from that spot to avoid being killed in the same way. Thus, if people are seen running away from a scene in a typical Nigerian urban city, nobody wants to wait and find out the cause. They would just start running too, and would even scold inquisitive passers-by, who may have the temerity to ask what was happening. There is no doubt that many innocent persons have unfortunately lost their lives under such circumstances.

With regard to narration, *Issakaba 2* takes more or less an omniscient narration. Attention also needs to be drawn to a funny inexplicable camera movement in the sequence where Ebube and his boys approach Igbudu’s shrine. The shot in question does not seem to have any point of origin because in it, the camera looks as if there is some kind of magical presence on the ground. Basically, the film takes a totally omniscient narrative point of view dealing with the issue of ritual murder in a semi-urban community. Out of ignorance, people use paralogical means of explaining the phenomenon of ritual murders taking place within their society which the regular police system would have investigated to ensure that the culprits are brought to book. As earlier noted, the usage of disappearing acts and the turning of Igbudu into a stone, as a cliff hanger, are the most vulgar way of trying to sustain the interest of the gullible viewers in the next part. One may not call it a sequence because it is a wrong application of the TV soap opera tradition. The director uses it as a cliff hanger for the next part so as to sustain the audiences’ interest since the story in *Issakaba 3* is about the quarrel within the group, the disenchantment and disagreement between Ebube and his lieutenant, Nwoke.

However, there is a relationship between the stories of *Issakaba 3* & *4*, in the sense that both of them centre basically on a house divided against itself. Incidentally, *Issakaba 3* tells

the story of Nwoke's rebellion against Ebube, as a result of greed and overambition. It starts with a convoy of motorbikes, popularly known as *okada*, escorting the Issakaba boys victoriously into the palace of the Igwe (Remy Ohajianya). There is wild jubilation because Igbugu, the masquerade behind the ritual killings in the community, has been apprehended. With their cowry necklace charm, the Issakaba make Igbugu to come out of the stone and Ebube says they (Issakaba) have accomplished their mission, so they are moving on that night. The people plead for more time because it was not enough for the little children to be left for the wolf to prey on. Their fear soon materialises because Nwoke, the second in command in the Issakaba field operations, becomes corrupt and starts taking gratification from the people contrary to the ideals of the group. He is arrested and excommunicated thus sparking off a crisis.

In their unwavering search for criminals, the Issakaba expose a female socialite, Madam Cash (Rita Edochie), on the highway. Her followers who are mostly women try to rally around her but Ebube tells them that, "who she is does not matter, but what she is in the society." To the amazement of her followers, the woman is compelled to confess with the aid of the Issakaba necklace that she has several powers all over her body and that she had killed many. According to her, the head of a one-week old baby was used to prepare a charm which was put on her tongue so that when she talks, nobody dared to challenge her. She had some incisions on her chest which make her stand out among her companions; she had also killed Comfort, a former President of the August Meeting six months earlier so that she would not contest against her. Furthermore, she had also killed her own father. In the face of the shocking revelations, Ebube warns that people should know the kind of leadership and followership they propose to leave for posterity.

In another sequence, there is a media report that one Chief Ukadike had been given the Issakaba treatment. The question on the lips of everyone was who would be the next victim because they realise that the last may not have been heard of the Issakaba. Thus, in the next sequence in the palace, some aggrieved chiefs, including women, insist that the Issakaba must

leave town because this is not their idea of justice; to them, it is not what they had bargained for; but the Issakaba interrupt the meeting and argue that what is happening is retributive justice. Some chiefs, led by Okenwa (Emeka Nwafor), express anger at various premeditated killings in the community by the Issakaba and condemn, in very strong terms, the public TV show the boys made of such horrible killings. Specifically, Okenwa argues that Issakaba is a political strategy of the highest order and that the persons who supported Chief Arinze against the incumbent Igwe were those being killed. They saw the action as a coup under the guise of justice which was protected by the law.

At the Issakaba camp, Ebube is moody and confides in Ikenna (Chuks Oparaocha) that the encounter with Nwoke exposed him as indulging in corrupt practices. According to Ebube, Chief Izu (Obi Ibegbunam) who had been suspected of aiding and abetting armed robberies had reported that Nwoke had demanded the sum of five hundred thousand naira as “investigation expenses”; and that he had paid an initial sum of one hundred and twenty thousand naira and was coming with the balance to ensure his freedom. Ebube posits that the problem with Nwoke is that of vaulting ambition and that while he does not feel a sense of loss for him, his fear is that he would lose his command one day.

At the police station, the chiefs put pressure on the DPO (Philip Emenike) to investigate and bring to a halt the unwholesome activities of the Issakaba; but the DPO maintains that the police cannot do anything because Issakaba was a product of the yearnings of the people. He however summons Ebube and his boys. When they arrive, Ebube argues that the actions of Issakaba are not politically motivated, but the DPO advises the boys to hand over culprits to the police and allow the law to take its due course. On his part, Ebube argues that the law was too slow because criminals have been known to escape while in police detentions. Consequently, the chiefs plot to dislodge the Issakaba and get a level playing field by strategising to dethrone the Igwe and install Chief Arinze. They reason that since Issakaba was formed by an unknown group

of traders, all they needed was to form a parallel vigilante group. Somehow, they find a ready ally in Nwoke since he had been angry with the way the Issakaba treated him, and he had vowed to bring them down to their knees. The chiefs, led by Okenwa, eventually provide the funds for Nwoke to set up the parallel group and he actualises his plan by picking hardened criminals, telling them that their mission is to destroy Issakaba. He informs them that as a founding member, he knows that the mythical figure of Ojadike is the secret of the strength of Issakaba. According to Nwoke, Ojadike was a mythical Igbo warrior who killed an innocent girl and buried her head to get supernatural powers. All they had to do was to re-enact history by kidnapping a girl, killing her and burying her head in the camp of the Issakaba boys. They recreate the ritual at night and Nwoke incants that the blood of the innocent girl should cry for vengeance against the Issakaba and render them powerless.

What follows is that, Nwoke fortifies members of the fake vigilante group he forms and they start their destructive operations. First, they humiliate a Director-General in the middle of the road, in front of his family, and only free him after subjecting him to the machete test to show that he had not shed innocent blood. Second, they disrupt a church service, harassing the pastor right in front of the congregation, accusing him of harbouring criminals, and villifying the Issakaba in his sermons. They subsequently steal the church offering. Third, they rob a bus and kidnap a girl, possibly to rape her, and so on. All of these criminal actions send wrong signals all over the town because the people are oblivious of the existence of a parallel vigilante group. Disillusioned with the activities of the fake vigilante group, Amazuru visits the Issakaba camp and tells Ebube that the people of the community were complaining about their operations. Meanwhile, one of the chiefs is happy with the impact of the fake Issakaba vigilante and visits their camp to make a two hundred thousand naira advance payment to settle scores with a man who had refused to sell a piece of land to him. The Issakaba arrive the crime scene after the fake vigilante had carried out the assassination, and they are pelted with all sorts of items by the irate crowd. Ebube is angry that they were

being humiliated by the same people who, only a few weeks earlier, had pleaded for them to stay to check criminal activities in the community.

Subsequently, the criminal activities of the fake vigilante become unbearable in Oshata in *Issakaba 4* and there are violent protests across the land because people are tired of burying their loved ones. Ebube is invited to the police station and he swears that his boys are innocent of the new crime wave. The DPO is surprised that the Issakaba do not have answers to the series of crimes in spite of all the charms they are wearing, warning Ebube that the police authorities were monitoring their activities. While Chief Okenwa (Emeka Nwafor) celebrates with Nwoke, they resolve that there was need to strike more fear and confusion into the hearts of the Issakaba. Again, there is a robbery operation in which the Issakaba arrest and give the culprit “the short-sleeve treatment” before shooting him. The explanation here is that the Issakaba had lost focus at this point because they were under pressure probably due to the prevalent negative reactions to their operations. For example, as a result of false allegations of running a robbery gang, Chief Odiachi (Bruno Iwuoha), who had supported the position that there was need to re-examine the operations of the Issakaba is arrested and his statement taken for the records. He returns home only to be rearrested, this time by the fake vigilante group who take him to the main road, put tyres around his neck, and set him ablaze. The real Issakaba come around and are again pelted with missiles by an irate crowd who mistake them for the culprits. Back in the Issakaba camp, there is confusion but Ikenna encourages Ebube.

In the sequence that follows, Amazuru goes to the camp and counsels that the Issakaba should leave town because of the negative reactions from the public. The police eventually arrest Ebube for the murder of Chief Odiachi; and at the station, they wonder if there is another group. At the palace, the chiefs insist that it was high time the Issakaba left town. After Ebube is released on personal recognition, he returns to the camp only to hear the news of the brutal killing of his mother by the fake Issakaba. He is still brooding on the attack on his family when

Amazuru comes in and urges the Issakaba to run away from the community before it is too late. Ebube opts to stay but commands his boys to leave, reminding them that, “No matter how rough the sea is, the captain never abandons his ship before the crew.” The youths come in and as they shoot at Ebube, the bullets do not penetrate his body. Instead, it is the native doctor, Isuofia (Richard Ogbonna), who fortified him that is affected because, “the protection of the young chick is in the wings of the mother hen.” Having run back to base, Ikenka orders that Ebube should go back:

IKENKA: The lion is shamed when it sees its cub running away at the mere barking of a dog ... The warrior who runs away from the battlefield on seeing the fierce sword of the enemy only deserves the praises of fools and the throne of a coward.

He offers to show Ebube the secrets so that he could go back to the field. He gives Ebube tested Issakaba warriors from Iwerri (Owerri) to follow him to Harcourt (Port Harcourt), and teach him how not to fight the spirit with the flesh.

From the interaction of the chiefs in yet another sequence, it is revealed that a plot had been masterminded by them to dethrone the Igwe based on the false premise that he had been unable to maintain law and order. In reaction, the Igwe vows to fight back and bring all his detractors to book. Little wonder then that when Ebube arrives Oshata at night as commanded by Ikenka with the new look Issakaba warriors, events take a new turn. Meanwhile, Amazuru (John Okafor) who had been accused of aiding and abetting the escape of the Issakaba, had made the camp his second home. He accompanies the new-look Issakaba to the point where the fake vigilante had done the ritual sacrifice, and exhumes the body of the young girl. A counter ritual re-enactment is carried out to appease the spirit of the dead girl. While Chief Okenwa (Emeka Nwafor), Chief Ifedibia (Emeka Ani), Sosoliso Mama (Oby Kechere), and others in their clique engage in backslapping, celebrating their initial success and the anticipated deposition of the Igwe in a few days, Ebube enters with his men to their utter amazement. He tells Chief Okenwa that, “Whenever you point a finger at some one,

three others point back at you,” and he decapitates him. Finally, Ebube tackles Nwoke at the side of a swimming pool for the final confrontation. With the supernatural assistance of his new associates, Ebube destroys the monster called Nwoke, thus freeing the real Issakaba from further public opprobrium. The lesson here is that, the danger of creating a monster is that, one day it will grow bigger than its creator.

A critical study of *Issakaba 3* shows that the opening sequence does not have much structural link with the story that unfolds because it is actually the end of *Issakaba 2*. It can be taken that the sequence is used more as a cliff hanger for *Issakaba 3*, which is also the most sophisticated of the *Issakaba* series, in terms of the narration. This position stems from the fact that *Issakaba 3* is anchored on flashbacks, depicting Nwoke’s subversive activities. Judging from earlier actions, Ebube had suspected that Nwoke, whom he had depended on as an able lieutenant, was going to revolt against him. Firstly, there had been a serious disagreement over the fate of Igbudu, whom the Issakaba had captured. While Ebube maintains that Igbudu should be brought before the Igwe, who should actually know, “the worms that had been eating the vegetables in the land,” Nwoke has the effrontery of challenging Ebube, insisting that Igbudu should be killed. The altercations are so heated that Nwoke ends up walking out on Ebube. This revelation is at a time when Ikenna notices that Ebube has been brooding for some time, and is always looking sad. So, he wants to know what is wrong and in the process of memory recall, Ebube begins to recall some of those past actions of Nwoke that had foreshadowed the revolt. Apart from the confrontation over the fate of Igbudu, another disconcerting disclosure is that of Nwoke extorting money from people who had been accused of collaborating with criminals. One of such persons, Chief Izu, came out of fear to report the fact that Nwoke had approached him to pay five hundred thousand naira as, “investigation expenses,” so that he could be let off the hook. He dared to show that he was not actually involved in the crime for which he was being investigated so he paid one hundred and twenty thousand naira since he did not have the whole money then. He was threatened by Nwoke that

if the balance was not paid on time Issakaba would come for him. Somebody owing him had paid him some money; and to avoid any embarrassment, he quickly brought the balance to buy his freedom. This is where Ebube gets the whole truth that Nwoke has actually broken ranks by taking bribe. Instead of fighting criminality, he resorts to criminality; as a result, Ebube has him excommunicated. Consequently, Nwoke is seen getting drunk and boasting of his past exploits as a member of the original Issakaba.

The story of *Issakaba 4* is basically a continuation of *Issakaba 3*, which ends with the killing of Chief Odiachi (Bruno Iwuoha); and the main narrative here is the final confrontation between Ebube (Sam Dede) and Nwoke (Michael Ogundu). It begins with Ebube and the boys running out of town after Ebube's younger brother comes to tell him that his mother has been killed by Issakaba. Ebube then wonders which Issakaba may have done that when he has been there with the boys all along and they have been suffering all kinds of accusations for crimes which they did not commit. It can be argued that the first scene is full of a lot of gaps which ought not to be. They have excommunicated one of their members (a very powerful member at that) who was there at the original founding of the Issakaba. On the other hand, they are being accused of all kinds of crimes, which they did not commit; yet, it never occurs to Ebube and the boys that they should find out what Nwoke is up to. That aspect of the story is not pursued; rather, it is from one accusation to the other until they are chased out of town and Ebube is reinforced and returns to uproot the body-less head buried in their headquarters.

Issakaba 4 also re-enacts the confrontation between Ebube and Nwoke, which takes place beside a swimming pool. It is a display of some of the so-called supernatural powers of being bullet-proofed, the power of hypnosis, the ability to demobilise people, and the ability to dematerialise and materialise. It cannot be also rationally explained how the other five new-look Issakaba warriors who come with Ebube to the camp to uproot the head of the girl embrace him and dematerialise into his body. This is an aspect of the story which is full of so much illogicality.

In the early history of cinema, directors used all kinds of vanishing effects, as part of their narrative techniques to impress the new audience that was being cultivated. Incidentally, this is what people are still fascinated with at the beginning of the 21st century. In the confrontation between Ebube and Nwoke, Nwoke is defeated but Ebube refuses to kill Nwoke himself. Rather, he uses one of the criminals/hoodlums Nwoke had recruited to kill him; this is a way of saying that the monsters Nwoke created consumed him. It is true that, scientifically, there is the phenomenon of hypnotism in which people can be hypnotised into doing things. One likely explanation could be that Ebube hypnotised Nwoke, and then through that state of hypnotism, he is able to make his (Nwoke's) own creation collect the gun to kill him.

As a point of fact, what brings about the downfall of Nwoke is that he has become too greedy to fit into the moral framework within which *Issakaba* was operating. *Issakaba* was supposed to be a vigilante group, formed for the purpose of providing security for a people who had lost faith in the police force. As at the time the historical Bakassi Boys fell apart, people had become fed up with their operations in the sense that the group had become an instrument of personal vendetta, for settling political scores; and that is what is depicted in *Issakaba 3 & 4*. Thus, there is continuity between *Issakaba 3 & 4* in the sense that they preach the same theme of greed and over-ambition on the part of Nwoke. On the contrary, this cannot be said of *Issakaba 2 & 3*. The conflict in *Issakaba 3 & 4* ends in a final showdown between Ebube and Nwoke, the two people struggling for leadership.

Another pertinent aspect of *Issakaba 3 & 4* is that, by this time, the *Issakaba* has become an instrument of personal vendetta. Chief Okenwa and a few other persons are now using the fake vigilante to fight their political opponents, or to fight people who would not want to sell their land. Whatever deal they have with people is their personal business; but unfortunately, they resort to using the fake *Issakaba* to enforce their private business arrangements. All of these are after the division between Nwoke and Ebube; and that division can

actually be read into some kind of social history in Nigeria with respect to the fall-out in ethnic groups, like the one between Dr. Frederick Fasheun, the OPC leader and Chief Gani Adams, the factional leader of its radical wing, as documented earlier. After the fall-out with Ebube, Nwoke is recruited by political opponents of the Igwe, who feel that he is not the rightful person that ought to occupy the throne. To members of this group, their friend, Chief Arinze, ought to have been the rightful monarch, and since Arinze is not occupying the throne, they are not going to allow the incumbent Igwe to have a peaceful reign. The above seems to explain why they gang up against him, recruiting and arming Nwoke to execute most of the nefarious activities they could not get the original Issakaba to execute. They use Nwoke's parallel vigilante group to harass innocent citizens, the climax of which is the killing of Chief Odiachi. Initially, Odiachi is innocently accused of sponsoring robbers, and this happen at a time when Ebube's boys are also already accused of crimes committed by the fake vigilante. The Issakaba takes him (Odiachi) to the police station to take his statement, investigate and find out that the chief is actually innocent and that he has been wrongfully accused of sponsoring criminals. The purpose of taking him before the DPO, according to Ebube, is that the Issakaba wants this kind of case to be documented. Shortly after Odiachi is released, the Nwoke-led fake vigilante boys arrest and brutally murder him.

It is worth noting that the emphasis here is not so much the wrongful accusation of Ebube and his boys. Of interest in *Issakaba* 3 & 4 is the fact that it is a reflection of the crises of confidence which had eaten deep into most of these ethnic-based groups which ganged up in the late 1980s, supposedly to take care of the failure of the policing system in the country, and how greed had brought about a deep gulf in the rank and file of these groups. Another point being made here is that in spite of the fact that Issakaba is still playing the role which it is supposed to play within the community, the initial faith which the people had in the group is no longer there because of the obnoxious activities of Nwoke and his boys. Thus, the whole of *Issakaba* 3 & 4 focus upon the crises of confidence that had set in and

which propels the action in the two parts. Furthermore, it is not so much the accusation of Madam Cash that is also of interest; rather, it is the fact that women too are involved in all these kinds of obnoxious ritual practices. Here is a woman who has so many followers because of her respectable social status, but behind that high class status, she is enmeshed in serious criminal and ritual practices. Unfortunately, the followership is so gullible that it is not discerning, especially as to how certain persons suddenly make it in life.

Ironically, there is something about the above phenomenon that is very disconcerting, because some of the stereotypes which European filmmakers and scholars had used against Africans are being replicated here. Most of these have to do with irrational behaviour in the sense that people are unable to compose themselves and argue out cases logically. There are not too many differences between the conduct of the original Issakaba and the fake Issakaba. They all drink excessively though the original Issakaba boys do not go about killing out of drunkenness; but at least the way and manner they went about dispensing justice at the beginning of *Issakaba 3* is still unsettling. They are seen brandishing machetes and guns, jumping up and down like people who are possessed, cutting and shooting each other, and so on. Perhaps, the DPO in *Issakaba 4* amplifies this position when he says, "With all these charms, you still cannot foretell what is happening to you?" This is an aspect which cannot be overemphasised in that there are beliefs in the powers that enhance the activities of Issakaba, most especially, the so-called Ojadike mystery. Ojadike, according to the story, was a mythical Igbo warrior who was extremely valiant; but he killed an innocent girl which brought about his downfall. The story was that Issakaba derived its power from the spirit of Ojadike, which was invoked by the people. At the time Nwoke was trying to destroy and sabotage Issakaba from within, he reasoned that the only way to render Issakaba impotent and helpless was to re-enact the Ojadike myth.

However, the essence of re-enacting Ojadike's myth by getting involved in ritual sacrifice can actually be questioned because it will be recalled that one of the excuses used by the British to

colonise Africans was ritual sacrifice. Others include idol worship, cannibalism, the wrongful killing of twins, slavery and the rest of them. Somehow, all of these are the things being capitalised on in the film unconsciously and out of naivety. These are probably some of the reasons why some people did not feel very comfortable with the *Issakaba* series. For instance, if some of the crime-fighting methods utilised by the *Issakaba* are reflected on critically, it will substantiate the argument that they were playing into the hands of people who had criticised similar behavioural patterns in the past, as being those of primitive people who required to be taught the rational way of doing things. Put succinctly, when a crime is committed, the suspects should be subjected to rational investigation; detectives should go to the community to investigate and bring the culprits to book. What is encountered in the *Issakaba* series is what a typical Westerner will refer to as, “jungle justice.” With very little or no investigation into criminal acts, it is common knowledge that, in reality, many people may have been wrongfully killed in the past for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Thematically, the *Issakaba* series explores the phenomenon of insecurity in the Nigerian society, which had necessitated the formation of various vigilante groups. Pathetically, the Nigeria Police Force are unable to maintain law and order in the face of the wanton operations of men of the underworld. The police are helpless because of lack of basic crime-fighting equipment and, as DPO Idoko (Tom Njemanze) pointed out, it would be an act of suicide to face the superior firepower of armed robbers with mere batons or just “three bullets in a pistol.” The police are also seen to aid and abet crime as exemplified in the alliance of Chief Mbanefo and DSP Idoko. In the first place, Idoko tells his officers to take note of the amount lost by the lady to armed robbers at the beginning of *Issakaba*, apparently to check any attempt by the robbers to play double game when they make ‘returns.’ Secondly, he was also fronting for Chief Mbanefo in supplying arms and ammunition to armed robbers and getting good returns.

The *Issakaba* series also takes a critical look at the propensity for people to perform money-making rituals or other forms of

ritual practices to enhance their positions in life. This is a true reflection of the get-rich-quick syndrome in the larger society. Chief Edwin, for example, sacrifices three young girls for money-making rituals, while Nwoke murders a young virgin for the ritual that made the original Issakaba powerless. Madam Cash, on the other hand, has done many rituals in order to become an influential socialite with a retinue of female followers. Unfortunately, her followers are oblivious of her evil designs and manipulations in her bid to acquire her present status. She represents the class of leaders who go to any length to get what they want, and enjoy all the perks of office with impunity. Ironically, the general public sings the praises of such persons who live ostentatiously despite the questionable and ignoble roles they may have played in their immediate environments.

On another level, the film takes a critical look at the question of leadership and followership in Nigeria. Ebube is a leader who is conscious of the need to maintain the integrity of Issakaba, and he works assiduously to achieve that objective, ready to lay down his life for the boys. That is why he orders them to make good their escape when the Issakaba boys are faced with the danger of mob action, saying, "the captain does not abandon his ship before his crew." He is also a leader who understands the plight of his followers, which explains his indignation when the boys are called upon to go for a fresh assignment when they need to be with their families. His concept of leadership contrasts sharply with that of Madam Cash or Nwoke, who are self-centred, and who would do anything, including taking human lives, to get what they want.

The film also highlights the view that vigilante groups are the creations of the sociopolitical conditions prevalent in the country. This is a substantiation of the popular dictum that "the danger in creating monsters," as exemplified by the Issakaba, "is that they turn against the creator," as exemplified in the rebellion of Nwoke. Issakaba, like the Bakassi boys, is formed as a necessity to fight crimes; but the vigilante group soon transforms into an instrument for multi-faceted criminal activities. It becomes a means of settling personal scores when Ebube and Nwoke part ways. For example, in *Issakaba 3 & 4*,

Chief Okenwa and others have an axe to grind with the Igwe for defeating their candidate, Chief Arinze, to ascend the throne. Not to be outdone totally in the political equation in the community, they feel the best way to bring the Igwe down is to cause mayhem through the subversive activities of the fake Issakaba. Chief Izu, on the other hand, is ready to pay five hundred thousand naira for the services of the fake Issakaba to settle his personal problem, such as using them to eliminate someone who had refused to sell a piece of land to him. It is not surprising then that in the last sequence of the film, Ebube hands over the dagger to one of Nwoke's creations to stab him (Nwoke). Perhaps, this may also explain why the Bakassi Boys meet their Waterloo in their face-off with the Shoe Maker's Association, the organisation that nurtured it.

From the foregoing analysis of the film, it can be argued that the whole narration takes more or less an omniscient point of view in communicating the message. The story unfolds gradually from the point of view of omniscient narration; the director uses flashbacks only occasionally as a narrative technique in telling the story in *Issakaba 3*, firstly, to show when Nwoke is identified as the person who demands bribe; secondly, to show how he rebels against the leadership of Ebube; and thirdly, to show how Nwoke saves the life of Okechukwu. In another vein, it can also be argued that the film is presented from the perspective of documented history, in the sense that it attempts to document the exploits of the Bakassi Boys, using artistic licence to present certain aspects in a dramatic manner. As it were, some parallels can easily be drawn between the activities of the Bakassi Boys and the portrayal of the Issakaba. In the depiction of Chief Odiachi, the real-life story of Chief Okonkwo, who was brutally murdered in Onitsha, plays out. This is not surprising because this part of the film is actually set in Oshata (Onitsha) as against the first part which is set in Ayaba (Aba), the birthplace of the Bakassi Boys. The film also attempts to establish the various supernatural methods used by the Bakassi Boys to fight crime. These include the use of necklace charms to extract confessions, the use of machete to test the innocence or involvement of suspects, the amputation of

culprits (long sleeve or short sleeve treatment) depending on the gravity of the offence, bodies which are magically bullet-proofed (ode-eshi), and the supernatural sensing of criminal operations. The emergence of the fake vigilante also parodies the realities of opposing factions in the vigilante service in its heydays, especially in Aba and Onitsha.

Aesthetically speaking, everything the audience sees in a film has passed through the eye of the camera, which explains why film is a visual medium. In other words, whatever dramatic action is presented in a story is determined by what the camera sees and how it sees it. Everything is influenced by the capability and versatility of the camera and its manipulator – the director. The use of low and high angle shots in some sequences, notably in the sequence where Nwoke is sitting down after he has been brought down by Ikenna and the other boys, is instructive. During the dialogue that ensues, each time Ebube is speaking, he is shot from a low angle which places him larger than life above Nwoke; and, of course, Nwoke is shot from a reverse angle from the perspective of Ebube, looking down at him. This, more or less, symbolises the moral superiority of the state from which Ebube is operating. Apart from the physical enlargement of the vigorous Ebube, morally speaking at this point, Nwoke is a fallen deputy, sitting down on the ground. He is no longer talking to Ebube, man to man, the way he argues with him in the flashbacks in which Ebube recalls his revolt. At this point, Nwoke is down and he looks up at Ebube from his position on the ground, at his (Ebube's) mercy. In some sequences involving Chief Okenwa and others in his house, shots are taken from very low angles, thus magnifying their status. There is no doubt that this becomes very effective, especially at points where the camera assumes a subjective point of view. For instance, when the Issakaba boys are beating Nwoke, there are some unsteady shots to give the impression that the camera has become part of the action, and is trying to record the violence from that perspective. Furthermore, in the last meeting sequence in *Issakaba 4*, where the chiefs are celebrating the impending dethronement of the Igwe, the new-look Issakaba boys enter the scene on a low angle shot. Somehow, this picture

composition becomes symbolic from the point when Ebube climbs on top of the table because the others look up to him as he is symbolically sitting in judgment over them. Thus, those particular shots can be read as structures of narration depicting his moral superiority over those who have been indicted.

In the sequence where Madam Cash is arrested, there is a repetition of the above structure in terms of narration. She is forced down and they hang the charm round her neck, and she begins to confess her atrocities. What is of interest at this point is that she is down and this point of reference also reflects her moral position in the story. She talks pitifully and looks up to the women for whom she has been a bad example because they (the women) had been associating with a criminal without knowing, and that is why Ebube warns them to be careful with the kind of leaders that they follow. It is possible that they might have been following her out of ignorance or probably as a result of her fetish hold on them. From the perspective of the women, they are morally superior to Madam Cash at this point in time because they now look down at her. Ebube talks down at her since they no longer operate from the same level. Similarly, the same could be said of the confrontation between Nwoke and Ode-eshi, where the latter fell on the ground, pleading for mercy, having been subdued by the former. It is understandable that shots from Ode-eshi's point of view (POV) are low angle shots; while those from the POV of Nwoke are high angle shots to depict their symbolic statuses at that point in time.

Another sequence worth recalling is at the point where Nwoke fortifies his boys in readiness for their operation. It is quite impressive, not in the sense of putting up any extraordinary show, but because it exemplifies the propensity of creating a myth around the possibility of people becoming impenetrable to bullets and machete cuts. Nwoke goes around with a basket, putting leaves in the mouths of his boys as a way of fortifying them and because of that, they assume that their bodies have become impenetrable to bullets. Of course, it is obvious that they are not, because in the end, all of them get killed in the confrontation. It is not true that when people are shot point blank with rifle bullets, they are impenetrable. Some

people believe that to be able to recruit people into that kind of arrangement, they need to be psyched up. It is possible that out of panic, people may not have really aimed well at their targets before pulling the trigger. Under such a situation, the bullet would certainly not hit the target and it is foolhardily taken to be part of the bullet-proof charm. In the Nigerian society, such belief systems about mystical skills of people vanishing, people who are impenetrable to bullets, and so on, are sustained. Many innocent persons are killed with impunity by the fake vigilante group, including the man whom they are contracted to kill, because he refuses to sell his land, and Chief Odiachi whose murder incenses the people.

It has been observed, in the course of the analysis, that *Issakaba 3 & 4* are much more closely related in terms of structural continuity. The story is constructed in such a way that *Issakaba 3* forms the background for the rebellion, while *Issakaba 4* builds on it with series of confrontations between the original Issakaba and the fake vigilante. The climax is when the community decides to run the original Issakaba out of town because of the question of mistaken identity. Ebube is cornered by the irate mob after he has told his boys to run away; when he is cornered, his spiritual guardian has to take the bullets meant for him; and he has to return to base for fortification. The fortification has to do with another re-enactment, so to say, as it entails invoking the spirit of the girl that had been beheaded to render the Issakaba powerless. The girl's head is now called forth from where it is buried and the headless body is also brought from where it is buried and the two are grafted together. She is told that it was not Issakaba that was the cause of her plight but enemies of Issakaba, and she is told to join the ancestors in peace. Of course, this is the point at which the last confrontation begins. Ebube and his new warriors that come to reinforce him accompany him to encounter Chief Okenwa and his cohorts as they celebrate the impact of the destructive activities of Nwoke and his boys. Ebube and his men enter the house at that point and he dispenses instant justice by killing all of them before leaving for the last confrontation with Nwoke.

In the end, what is proved here is that the story is not only

being sustained by the method of beheading which makes *Issakaba* to be very popular. The beheading, the shooting, the shouts of “odeishi,” and the rest of it are what make the *Issakaba* series very popular. For example, when this series was released in 2001/2002, little children used to shout, “ode-esi,” if pushed by someone. This was because they had watched the series and felt that if somebody pushed them and they shouted, “ode-esi,” then nothing would happen to them. The fact is that the series played aptly on the belief systems of the people, betraying the fact that even as educated as they were, they still go to meet very poor men who live in wretched environments to ask for charms that would make them rich. The funny thing is that such persons do not even ask why the medicine man had not empowered himself and become extremely rich if he could make charms that could make other people rich. There is no doubt that this is the foundation upon which *Issakaba 2* was built. For instance, Chief Edwin paid people to kill for ritual purposes in order to make money. One wonders why Igbudu could not make himself rich and live in a palace instead of living in the bush, if he could actually make others rich. Unfortunately, people do not ask such rational questions. Instead, they just believe that by running to meet a wretched looking old man in a small cave or broken down hut, they could be empowered, or that he can transform their body to be bullet-proofed. Paradoxically, people have gone to villages to make such charms and died secretly or naively for such beliefs. This is because at the end of the day, they would want to try the efficacy of such charms, and have been killed in the process. Predictably, the medicine man would vanish into the bush to avoid facing dire consequences. These are part and parcel of African belief systems which were exploited in the *Issakaba* series. The fact is that people are caught between two cultures, between modernity and traditional African belief systems.

There is need to examine the opening sequence of *Issakaba 3*, where there is the symbolic aspect of the use of motorcycles, popularly known as “okada” in Nigeria. The entrance of the *Issakaba* boys into the palace is heralded by a wild display of motorcyclists in the palace ground. This type of display of

expertise in the use of motorbikes is a social phenomenon people encounter daily, especially during burials and major social or ceremonial events. It is also a system used by expert motorbike dispatch riders in the military to herald visiting dignitaries and display their craft or expertise on motorbikes before the arrival of such dignitaries. In recent years, it has been popularised by Charlie Boy Oputa, a popular Nigerian musician, who takes delight in riding powerbikes and mobilises okada riders for major occasions. The opening sequence in *Issakaba 3* has some social or historical significance in the sense that it reflects an era when Nigerians, rather than depending on civilised modes of transportation, such as taxis, used motorbikes because of the level of poverty. This is something which may look a little bit outrageous to the Western world because they are used to people using taxis, buses and metro lines as means of transportation. Big motorbikes (or powerbikes) are meant to be used for leisure. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, they are used for transportation.

In terms of characterisation, there is need to acknowledge the importance of characters like Ebube, Nwoke, Chief Odiwe, DPO Idoko, Chief Mbanefo, Ikuku, Amazuru, Igbudu, Ikenka, Chief Okenwa, Chief Edwin, Chief Odiachi, and the Igwe in the sense that these are the major channels through whom the action of the film is propelled. Ebube (Sam Dede) is the leader of the Issakaba field operations, who displays exemplary leadership qualities. He is a leader who instils discipline in his followers, and has a discerning spirit, supposedly because of the charms that had been used to fortify them. He shows total commitment to the cause of Issakaba but knows when he faces an uphill task. For instance, he visits a medicine man when he realises that Ikuku is a hard nut to crack. In the face of imminent danger from mob action, he ensures the safety of his boys before he runs for dear life back to the Issakaba base. This was at a point when he realised that the forces against him were insurmountable. He trusted Nwoke so much that he was in deep grief when he rebelled against his leadership and the ideals of Issakaba.

Nwoke (Mike Ogundu), on the other hand, is a young man who is ruled by greed and inordinate ambition. He is one of the

founders of Issakaba and knows all the secrets behind the group. Though he was the second in command of the group, he sees himself as an alternative leader and believes that Ebube has no special qualities which make him to be much more qualified as a leader than himself. Perhaps, that gives him the false confidence to regularly challenge Ebube's leadership. The climax of it, of course, is when he starts going to collect money from people believed to have committed or abetted crimes. When he puts in place the fake Issakaba, he goes to the extent of shedding innocent blood which is against the ideals of the original Issakaba group. He unleashes his ruthless nature on victims in all his operations and goes to the extent of killing Ebube's mother, all in the bid to unsettle Ebube and the real Issakaba.

Chief Odiwe (Chiwetalu Agu) is the guide of Issakaba who was initially skeptical of their operations, because he expresses disgust at the beheading of the blind beggar in the opening sequence of the first part of the film. When he eventually becomes their guide or facilitator, he puts everything into the new assignment. He is an inquisitive person and always follows the movements of the Issakaba, which explains why he wants to know the secrets behind the actions of the boys. He is daring because he goes as far as drinking their concoctions to acquire the power of invincibility. Though he is not rich, as he is seen drinking garri in the afternoon, he refuses the one hundred thousand naira bribe offered him by Chief Mbanefo. This portrays him as an incorruptible person and the consequence is that his wife and child are kidnapped. When Ebube tells him at the end that his wife and child are alive and safe, his joy knows no bounds.

DPO Idoko (Tom Njemanze) is the Divisional Police Officer in the police station, which means he is supposed to be the chief security officer in the community. Pathetically, he is one of the worms eating out the soul of the community, as he is a source of dispensing arms and ammunition to armed robbers. Distressed persons who run to him for protection are always disappointed because he only ends up getting vital information to accost the armed robbers to get his own share of the booty. Idoko is quick to recognise danger because he becomes

apprehensive when he realises that the Issakaba boys are on his trail, and he tells Chief Mbanefo that he is backing out. He acts tough and attempts to play the harmless and dutiful police officer when the Issakaba confront him. The false impression disintegrates suddenly when he discovers that bullets fired at the Issakaba boys by his equally criminally minded son have no effect on them.

The character of the first Igwe (played by Amaechi Muonagor) in *Issakaba* is also of interest here because apart from inviting the boys, he gives them the go-ahead to operate without fear or favour. Ironically, he had lost faith in the regular policing system and opts for the services of the vigilante group. He maintains that his son should be made to face the consequences of his atrocities, thus revealing his nature as a just leader who puts state interest above personal interest. This is in the sense that many leaders would have made exceptions in situations like the one that he is faced with, most especially as his wife pressurises him to reconsider his hard stance. The truth is that many persons in his position would have capitulated to the demands of family ties and made concessions.

Chief Mbanefo, alias Chairman (Pete Eneh), is a member of the council of chiefs who donates the sum of two million naira, one Mercedes Benz and a building as the camp for the Issakaba boys, meaning that he single-handedly picks the bills for their operations. Mbanefo represents the numerous fraudsters in the country who appear philanthropic during the day only to be involved in clandestine criminal activities at night. He is an arms dealer who uses the local police chief to achieve his selfish aims, and when the DPO expresses fears about the threat from the Issakaba boys, he calms him down. He is also a very crafty person, which explains why he attempts to bribe Chief Odiwe and suggests to him that there is need for them to form an alternative vigilante group. When his approach does not succeed, he masterminds the kidnapping of Odiwe's wife and child.

Ikuku (Zulu Adigwe) is the medicine man who fortifies Danga (Andy Chukwu), the terror of the night, and his gang of armed robbers who operate in the community. As a spiritual godfather, he lives off proceeds from armed robbery operations

because his clients (the robbers) provide very well for him. This explains why he lives in a fine one-storey building. He prepares the concoctions that fortify Danga and his gang members against machete cuts and gunshots. Also, he is very confident of his abilities because of his belief in the efficacy of his supernatural powers. He is not intimidated by the presence of Issakaba in town, and he is not afraid when they come to apprehend him during the first confrontation. Unfortunately, this overconfidence is his undoing because he does not anticipate that Ebube may have gone to strengthen himself for the final onslaught.

Chief Edwin (Ejike Asiegbu) is a greedy man who feels that the best way to revive his ailing business is to indulge in ritual sacrifices. Again, this is another social malaise in Nigeria because if a man's business is not doing well, all he needs to do is to hire a good or well-trained manager. If he is an entrepreneur who was managing his business, probably his lifestyle may have eaten deeply into his capital, so he may need to recapitalise. It is possible that while the business was going down, he needed the means of continuing to sustain the lifestyle he had got used to. Chief Edwin realises that his friend, who had come to the shrine of Igbudu, is prospering so he wants to follow his footsteps. He recruits young men to abduct three maidens for the purpose of using them as "money dispensing machines." Ironically, he lives a false life and gives the impression that he is a very good Christian, as exemplified in the crucifix on his door-post, and also has an arrogant air, which he displays when the Issakaba visit him. He reveals true human frailty when he realises that he is facing the Issakaba and that his evil deeds have found him out. He becomes like a jelly, ready to do whatever the Issakaba command him to do. He is thus compelled to take Ebube and his boys to the shrine of Igbudu.

Igbudu (Columbus Irisoanga) is the native doctor that Chief Edwin consults to make his business to thrive once again. Unlike Ikuku, Igbudu has his shrine in the deep forest, and one wonders how in his wretched condition he could make people to become rich. Also, he has faith in his powers and does not take cognisance of the supernatural powers that the Issakaba also

possess. In the heat of his confrontation with Issakaba, he changes to a stone, and the boys demystify him by urinating on the stone. He becomes a mere instrument in the hands of Issakaba, to be turned back to his human form in a hypnotised state and then back again to stone. Funny enough, when Ebube presents him to the Igwe, he refuses to take responsibility but rather says that the Issakaba boys should do whatever they like with him.

Surprisingly, Ikenka (Chudi Kashimawo), an invalid confined to a wheelchair and living in a luxury compound, is the overall leader of the Issakaba. He is a man who has a human heart and who is totally committed to the ideals of Issakaba. He ensures that anytime there is a distress call, Issakaba must answer the call, because every member of the group chose to be Issakaba out of personal volition. For example, in the last sequence of *Issakaba 2*, he comes to Ebube's rescue when Igbudu had the upper hand in the confrontation. When Ebube becomes helpless, he tells Nwoke to get Ikenka to come quickly to their assistance and he is seen putting on his war paraphernalia for the serious battle. As earlier stated, he does this by dematerialising from the Issakaba base and materialising at the shrine of Igbudu. Ikenka is a very brave warrior. He abhors failure and does not expect the Issakaba to run away in the face of formidable oppositions. This is why in *Issakaba 4*, he feels disappointed that Ebube runs back to base when he is faced with mob action. To avoid a re-occurrence, he takes Ebube to the next level by fortifying him and giving him tested warriors to go back to finish the battle he had started.

Like Chief Odiwe in *Issakaba*, Amazuru (John Okafor) is the guide that facilitates the movement of the Issakaba boys in *Issakaba 3 & 4*. He leads the protest of the villagers because his brother is a victim of ritual killing, and the chiefs-in-council decide that he should take the letter requesting the intervention of the Issakaba to their base. He is a man who is not quick-witted and easily recoils every time Ebube breathes down his neck. He develops emotional attachment to the group and is concerned about their wellbeing. This explains why he expresses concern when there are negative public reactions to the actions

of the fake vigilante which are thought to be the handiwork of the real Issakaba, and he alerts them when the irate youths start the protest march to their camp. He is easily frightened, and faints when he sees the exhumation and joining of the head and the body of the young girl murdered to re-enact the Ojadike myth.

Chief Okenwa (Emeka Nwafor), the self-appointed leader of the opposition in the council of chiefs, does the yeoman's job by recruiting and funding the operations of the fake vigilante. He prides himself with the sobriquet, "Mr. Fix it," and attempts to live up to that name by mobilising many prominent men and women to plot the removal of the incumbent Igwe so that his preferred candidate, Chief Arinze, would be installed. His plan is to use the nefarious activities of the fake vigilante to give the general impression that the Igwe was incapable of maintaining law and order in the community, and so, have him removed. His plan fails because while he is celebrating with his cohorts, Ebube, whom they had run out of town, resurfaces and metes out instant justice.

Chief Odiachi (Bruno Iwuoha) is a law-abiding citizen who is a victim of personal vendetta. He is accused falsely of harbouring criminals and aiding and abetting criminal activities in the community. He is arrested and released first by the original Issakaba, only for him to be rearrested by the fake vigilante. He dies proclaiming his innocence, and it is not surprising that the people are jolted to action with his gruesome murder. Ironically, the people mistake the original Issakaba to be responsible for the various crimes, especially the brutal murder of Odiachi. His murder is the last straw that breaks the camel's back, so to speak, as far as the activities of the Issakaba are concerned. The interesting thing is that retributive justice takes place at the end of the film.

Another aspect worth examining in the *Issakaba* series is the narrative implausibilities found in situations where robberies are going on and people still move about as if nothing is happening. These are things which are part of the production contingencies in Nollywood where a film is put together within one week. It can be said then that these implausible actions

result from the inability of directors to take note of narrative details. In the process of robbing a bus, the fake vigilante boys push the passengers out of the bus, force them to lie on the ground, and then escape in their get-away car. All this while, motorists are seen driving past the scene of the robbery as if all is well. After they rob a supermarket, they cross the major road to their get-away car firing shots, presumably to scare people. Unfortunately, other road users go about their normal businesses as if there is nothing out of place. The truth of the matter is that there is no way a robbery operation would be going on in a place and people would be going about their businesses as if nothing was happening. If there were to be any armed robbery in a place, passers-by would run for dear life; also, some motorists would jump out of their vehicles and run helter-skelter, especially when there are gunshots.

Just as art mirrors society, the film portrays the issue of land disputes which has become a major problem in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, most likely because of population explosion. Whereas, in the past, land used to be owned by families and someone could just go to meet the elder in the family for a plot of land to farm, families are now becoming larger, and land is becoming smaller comparable to family sizes. The issue of land ownership has become a major problem, not only in south-eastern Nigeria, but throughout Nigeria, and indeed Africa. The protracted communal clashes between Ezza and Ezillo communities in the present Ebonyi State and the people of Aguleri and Umuleri communities in Anambra State, are typical examples of the extent to which lives have been wasted over land ownership. The problem is highlighted in *Igodo*, *Egg of Life*, and *Issakaba* 4. However, what is of importance in terms of the narrative focus is that *Issakaba* which was formed originally as a vigilante group to protect the people who could not be protected by the regular police force had now degenerated into a monster, and had become factionalised to the point that the enemies of *Issakaba* are now exploiting the division within the organisation to feather their nests by using the group as an instrument of personal vendetta. The fake *Issakaba* is used to settle a land dispute when a land owner refuses to sell his land.

Thus, the land issue is one of the symbolic representations of sources of division in modern Nigerian society.

Furthermore, the use of sound effects and songs which reinforce the narrative functionality in films is significant. This functionality is in the sense that any time the fake vigilante boys come in, that song is played, signalling that the fake group is coming for an operation. That helps to separate or demarcate the space of operation of the original Issakaba boys from the fake vigilante group. The sound is complemented by the background music at key points, specifically at the police station when the lady reports a car theft, the arrival of Issakaba at Ayaba, Ebube questioning Chief Odiwe as to what he wants in the camp, the bringing in of the first armed robber, and so on. In places where the mood needs to be heightened, incidental music is used profusely. When the Issakaba are going for any operation, their signature tune, "Issakaba oweiya Issakaba," is used, and most times reduced to the background when dialogue comes in. Also, after the formation of the alternative vigilante group, their movements are always heralded with their own signature tune, thus:

Song	Translation
<i>Ndi ugha ndi ugha</i>	Liars Liars
<i>Ndi-nche ugha</i>	Fake vigilante
Fake vigilante	Fake vigilante
Fake vigilante	Fake vigilante

Incidentally, both vigilante signature tunes are fast-paced, apparently because of the dominant moods of their actions.

In the area of costumes, it should be noted that the only distinguishing factor is the song, which distinguishes the fake vigilante from the Issakaba. They all use the same red band round their arms, the same type of long machetes, and wear the same type of charms which are the kind of things that would be seen in most documentaries of warlords as was the case in war-torn Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast. For example, when Samuel Doe and his boys were fighting Charles Taylor, it was the same kind of dresses they wore, and people believed

that they were impenetrable to bullets. Somehow, the use of regular T-shirts and boots, bandanas, and the strips of cowries tied around the forehead and the arms by the fake vigilante make the decoy very effective. The monarchs and the chiefs use modern traditional Nigerian attires like royal regalia, caftans, agbada, jumpers, lace buba (for the women), and so on, to symbolise their economic status. Perhaps, one strong point in the series is the make-up design. Apart from the straight make-up of the cast, the conceptualisation of scars, blood stains and effects, severed heads and arms, the head and body of the girl sacrificed by Nwoke and his boys affirm the importance of make-up in enhancing the visual elements of the series. Just as art mirrors life, life also mirrors art, in the sense that people see stars dressed in certain ways when they watch movies; and those designs become fashionable with the rest in the society.

The point should also be stressed that though people are living in a modern age, they are still very much tied to the traditional belief systems and ways of life. This is in the sense of being a hybrid people, very much enmeshed, psychologically speaking, in old traditional belief systems while at the same time sharing in the benefits of modernity. All the facilitators of the security system, Ebube, his boys, and those who support them, are driving cars; they are all wearing jeans, berets and sun-glasses; and among other things, they are armed with pistols. As it were, all of these costumes and accessories are products of modernity and industrialisation, and by extension, modern science and technology. Paradoxically, these same people subscribe to the belief that their bodies could be impenetrable to bullets which travel at the speed of light. As earlier observed, this myth is what sustains the story because religion is not something that can be subjected to modern scientific thoughts. People are still half-traditional and half-modern people, not fully modern because a fully modern society will not subscribe to the kind of story where people vanish, are impenetrable to machete cuts and bullets, and could dematerialise, and so forth. This goes a long way in substantiating the point that there are a lot of ambivalences in this story.

It may also be pertinent to relate the operations of the

Issakaba with real-life happenings in the operations of the Bakassi boys, which led to the disintegration of the group. In the operations of the Bakassi boys, it had been noted that the killing of one Chief Okonkwo caused the revolt of the traders of the Shoemakers Line in Ariaria Market. A correlation of this happening is found in the killing of Chief Odiachi in *Issakaba 3*. Historically speaking, the Bakassi boys killed a pregnant woman and it was the killing of that woman that made the traders to revolt, mobilise and fight back, which eventually led to their disintegration.

In terms of classification, the film is a crime story; and it is about gangsterism. It is a crime story in the sense that most criminals are operating at will; also, it is all about gangsterism in the sense that most of the criminals are brought to justice. This classification is quite important because it is part and parcel of the genre, and, of course, this study is specifically dealing with trends in the genres which have emerged within the industry. Basically, in terms of style, the narration is omniscient because most of the story is not anchored through narrators or point of view shots. The story just unfolds with Ebube and his boys coming into town and helping to cleanse the town of people who have been agents of armed robbery within that community. Some people had constituted themselves into a source of crisis within that community and the Issakaba boys undertake a surgical operation to make sure they are uprooted. Perhaps, as noted, what one might find objectionable is that the whole process is anchored on traditional African belief system which cannot be rationally explained within a modern set-up.

However, it can be argued that government ought to have put her foot down when this so-called alternative policing system emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s in this country. Incidentally, toward the end of the presidency of Obasanjo, that tendency had been reduced drastically compared to when he newly came to power. Then, the Bakassi boys, the Odua Peoples' Congress, MASSOB, and Egbesu boys, among others, were reigning in a society that was living in anarchy, and was at the point of disintegration. This anarchic social phenomenon is what is exhibited in the *Issakaba* series. It portrays a society where

people dispense justice outside the legal, judicial system. This explains why in *Issakaba 2*, Ebube says that they have come to the realisation that what they were doing was bad and that they ought to hand over criminals to the regular police force. As a point of fact, there is a redeeming part of the story toward the end of the first film. When they come to the Igwe's palace to exhibit all the criminals, it is discovered that they were not actually killing them when they were caught initially; but that they were taking them to a detention camp. When they disperse finally, the impression is that they are now going to kill them.

The editing of the film is good, except that the mercantilist disposition of the industry is reflected in the stretching of the film into four parts. A preview of the VCD copies of the film reveals the following:

Pt	Trailers	Disc 1	Disc 2	Duration
1	Nil	55m 45s	41m 22s	97m 07s
2	5m 45s	54m 14s	33m 05s	87m 19s
3	7m 40s	42m 20s	49m 27s	91m 47s
4	4m 28s	44m 32s	36m 05s	80m 37s

This explains why some sequences are unnecessarily long, apparently to elasticise the duration of the film. The fight sequences, the ritual sequences involving Igbugu, the display of the okada men and the Issakaba when they bring Igbugu to the palace of the Igwe, and the exhumation of the young girl, are some sequences that could have been made more crisp and dynamic. The special visual effects, which the director deployed to convey the message of the film, are also of interest. These include where Ebube cuts off the beggar's head and the headless body is seen gouging out blood, putting the necklace around the necks of suspects who start confessing after a special effect, people dematerialising and materialising, flying fire strikes, electrocution effect on Ikuku's feet, amputation of hands of suspects (the short-sleeve or long-sleeve treatment), the Issakaba machetes turning blood red when tested on armed robbers, the use of red, jagged and shaking opening captions which scroll across from the right to the left side of the screen in *Issakaba 4*, putting together the headless body and head of the little girl

sacrificed by Nwoke and making her to ascend into the sky, and so on.

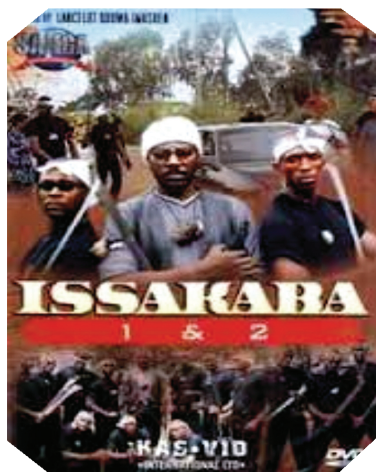
4.8 Summary

In this part, the failure of the police force which led to the rise of vigilantism in Nigeria has been examined. From a study of the rise of criminal activities to ritual and cultic practices, the scenario that necessitated the formation of vigilante groups was painted. It was noted that the dependence on the vigilante groups had been legitimised, especially in many states in the eastern part of the country prior to the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Since the selected films are based on the exploits of the Bakassi boys, this section has examined at length, the birth and crime preventive activities of the group, pointing out that their *modus operandi* include wanton killing of perceived armed robbers, torture of suspects so that they would confess, test of innocence or criminal involvement, intervention in private disputes, acting as political thugs, and being an instrument of revenge. Most of these methods are depicted in the *Issakaba* series, produced by Chukwuka Emelionwu and Moses Nnam and directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen.

In concluding this analysis of the *Issakaba* series, it can be posited that the stories are not realistic; rather, they border on magical realism. In as much as it is relevant to draw analogies between certain historical facts which inspired the film, that perspective has not been pursued too far in order to focus on reading of the series in terms of the narrative techniques. Also, the storyline has been analysed to provide an insight into the linear progression of the film. Serious attention has been devoted to symbolic analyses so that whoever is reading the work will know that it is not too much weighed in favour of the historical analysis. This was done in an attempt to explain the context from which the genre of vigilante films evolved.



Issakaba



Issakaba



John Okafor –
Amazuru in *Issakaba*



Lancelot Imasuen -
Director of Issakaba



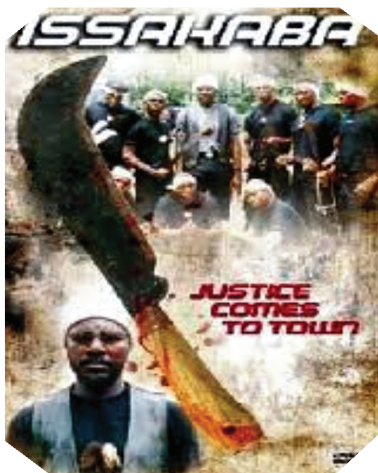
Issakaba



Sam Dede – Ebube in *Issakaba*



Chinwetalu Agu – Chief Odiwe in *Issakaba*



Issakaba



Sam Dede – Ebube in *Issakaba*



Ejike Asiegbu –
Chief Edwin in *Issakaba*



Pete Eneh –
Chief Mbanefo in *Issakaba*



Sam Dede (Ebube) and the *Issakaba* boys



Rita Edochie – Madam Cash in *Issakaba*



Tony Njemanze – DPO Idoko
in *Issakaba* with
Clarion Chukwura



Mike Ogundu –
Nwoke in *Issakaba*

Part 5



Portrayal of Politics and the Political Process in Nollywood: A Critical Reading of *The Senator* and *Masterstroke*

5.1 Introduction

In this part, a critical analysis of the political genre in Nigerian films will be attempted. It starts with a review of the concept of politics and the peculiar nature of the political process in the Nigerian experience. Two films have been selected for analysis, namely, *The Senator*, a two-part film produced and directed by Teco Benson, and *Masterstroke*, another two-part film produced by Rob Emeka Eze and Emem Isong and directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen. The two films have been selected because they portray salient elements of the game of politics as it is played in the Nigerian political arena. Furthermore, they are directed by two brilliant film directors, who have left their names in the sands of time, in the annals of Nollywood, the contemporary Nigerian film industry.

5.2 The Concept of Politics

Political scientists see politics as “the art of the government of a state.” *Wikipedia*, the online Encyclopaedia, states this much when it defines politics as “the art or science of government or governing, especially the governing of a political entity, such as a nation, and the administration and control of its internal and external affairs”. It also provides other definitions thus: “the activities or affairs engaged in by a government, politician, or political party”; and “the methods or tactics involved in managing a state or government.” Yet another definition proffered by *Wikipedia* is that politics is “intrigue or manoeuvring within a political unit or group in order to gain control or power.” Also, it is “often internally conflicting interrelationships among people in a society.” It is consequent on these definitions that *Wikipedia* concludes that politics is “the process by which individuals or relatively small groups attempt to exert influence over the actions of an organisation” (“Politics,” p.1). From the foregoing, five meanings can be deduced from the concept of politics, as;

- i) the social relations involving authority or power.
- ii) the study of government of states and other political units.
- iii) the profession devoted to governing and to political affairs.
- iv) the opinion you hold with respect to political questions; and
- v) the administration and control of the internal and external affairs of a country.

From the foregoing, it can be surmised that politics involves the handling of public affairs or public life as it relates to governance, and that one has to be schooled in the art of governance when getting involved in the game of politics. In an ideal setting, politics entails the existence of two inter-dependent groups in a given society – those at the corridors of power (the rulers or the government) and those who give the authority to the rulers to rule (the ruled or the masses). In this arrangement, the former has the mandate (or power) to make and enforce law and order; and the latter give their support and do not take laws into their hands. The fact is that the measurement of good

governance is the satisfaction of the primary wants of the ruled – food, potable water, clothing and shelter. When a government records considerable level of success in governance, it is reflected in the faces of the citizenry in their day-to-day life. Under such a situation, there are no fears or uncertainties, no long-drawn faces, no killer diseases, sicknesses and/or acts inimical to social order. The reverse would be the case where a government is an unqualified failure. This explains why an enlightened population influences policies that would affect them or the governors.

5.3 Forms of Government

A form of government refers to the set of political institutions by which a state is organised in order to exert its powers over a political community. Each political entity is unique and works under a different power structure and social configuration. Most countries have official names, which identify their forms of government, or at least the form of government toward which they are striving. This explains why there are names like Federal Republic of Nigeria, Congo Democratic Republic, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, People's Republic of China, United States of America, United Kingdom, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and so on. However, two prominent systems of government need to be identified, for the purpose of this study, namely, the *Parliamentary* and *Presidential* systems of government.

The parliamentary system is a type of government in which the power to make and execute laws is held by a parliament. Britain is reputed to have one of the oldest parliamentary systems of government in the world. In a parliamentary system, the executive branch of government depends on direct or indirect support of the Parliament, often expressed through a vote of confidence. Hence, there is no clear-cut separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches, often leading to lack of checks and balances as it obtains in the presidential system. This system serves useful purposes because it is flexible and responsive to the public.

In the presidential system of government, the executive branch exists, and presides, separate from the legislature. In

practice, the president is both Head of State and Head of Government in a presidential system of government and he/she has no formal relationship with the legislature. In other words, the president is not a voting member in the legislature ("Presidential Republic," p.1). The presidency, the legislature or even private citizens could sponsor bills in the Presidential system. In such a system, as in the United States and Nigeria, the president has the power to veto acts of the legislature; and in turn, a majority of legislators may act to override the veto of the president. Secondly, in a presidential system, the president has a fixed term in office, which implies that elections are held at scheduled times and cannot be triggered by a vote of confidence, or other such legislative procedures. For example, section 135(2) of the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999, p.56) stipulates a four-year tenure for the president, and a further four years if he/she seeks and wins re-election. It is not surprising, therefore, that the National Assembly resisted the subtle machinations of the presidency, under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, to amend the constitution in favour of tenure elongation in early 2006.

Many presidential systems incorporate provisions for the president's trial and subsequent removal (impeachment) from office by the legislature if he/she is found to have committed a crime. It is interesting to note that, the presidency declared the office of the vice-president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria vacant when Alhaji Atiku Abubakar parted ways with President Obasanjo and the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), under which platform he had assumed office. The Federal Government stretched the legal battle to the Supreme Court of Nigeria, since the Federal Court of Appeal had ruled that under the provisions of the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999), the president had no *locus standi* to declare the office of the vice-president vacant. Incidentally, impeachments are taken as last resorts in advanced democracies where a government has been found wanting and every avenue had been explored to ameliorate the situation.

Also, the executive arm of government is uni-personal, in the sense that members of the cabinet serve at the discretion of

the president and must carry out the policies of the executive and legislative arms. The legislature approves nominees of the president to the cabinet as well as various governmental posts, such as Ministers, Ambassadors, Judges of the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the Chairman and National Commissioners of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Chairmen of Commissions—Federal Civil Service, Federal Character, EFCC, and ICPC, to mention a few. While the president has the power to issue orders to Cabinet members, the military, or any officer or employee of the executive arm generally, a president does not have the power to dismiss or give orders to judges because of the independence of the judiciary. The power to pardon or commute sentences of convicted criminals is generally vested on heads of states, with a separation of power between legislative and executive arms.

5.4 Perspectives on Nigerian Politics

Having taken a look at the nature of the presidential system of government which Nigeria professes to practise, it is necessary to now examine the features as they manifest in the country's political landscape. The *New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary* (1991) defines politics as the act of "scheming and manoeuvring with a group" (p.777). It is not surprising then that a politician is seen in a derogatory sense by the *New Lexicon Webster's* (1991) as "a person engaged in politics merely for personal gain" (p. 777). Though the dictionary says, 'in a derogatory sense,' there is no arguing the fact that this is the reality of the game of politics as played in Nigeria. There is the impression, generally, that politics is *the shortest cut to the top* and *it is the surest way to make it* or *arrive* in the society. To the average Nigerian politician, the game of politics is a do-or-die affair or winner-takes-all affair and if one has to enjoy the dividends, it (politics) does not have to be played by the rules.

In Nigeria, politics is also erroneously seen as a crafty way of getting into office and amassing wealth until one is pushed out unceremoniously. Where one fails to amass wealth like the Dr. Gabriel Okaras, Professor Tam David-Wests, the Dr. Dennis

Deni-Fiberesimas, or the Professor Kimse Okokos, in the old Rivers State, one becomes an object of ridicule among one's peers. Thus, the politicians: the military, civilians, or militicians (retired military men in politics), are men of many words, speaking from both sides of the mouth. Incidentally, the country has had the bitter taste of politicians in khaki that had seized power and held on to the governance of the country (by trial and error) for more than thirty out of the about fifty post-independence years. Though the military do not have the requisite training to participate in the art of civil and democratic governance, they had gate-crashed into the governance of Nigeria in January 1966, and held on to power with the force of the gun until 1979 when they handed over power to a civilian government. After a shortwhile, they staged a comeback between 1984 and 1999, making it appear as if they had only gone on sabbatical leave between 1979 and 1983. One possible explanation here is that having tasted the sweetness of power, the military were reluctant to let go the reins of government. As it is to be expected, those at the lower cadre of the military were always waiting to have their own taste of power and superintend the sharing of the national cake. The result had been an unending relay, as the soldiers passed the baton from one squad to the other, until 1999, when they reluctantly handed over power to a democratically elected government with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, himself a retired army general, as President.

From the foregoing, it can be posited that the legacy of Nigerian political tradition is *the determination of a group to get the revered political authority at all cost, and hold on to it as long as possible until they are forced to leave*. Since there is no insurance to stay "longer than necessary" due to the country's political instability, the belief is that one has to make the *best* use of the opportunity by embezzling whatever money that comes into the state coffers. Corruption has been the order of the day and those who are near the corridors of power beat the drums of sycophancy, as loud as possible, to receive the listening ears of the powers that be. A good case in point is the phenomenon of questionable sponsored solidarity visits, which have become cheap avenues legitimised by the military to give

the impression that they were needed in office. The irony of this phenomenon is that the same groups of persons that paid solidarity visits to Gen. Sani Abacha, for example, had paid similar visits to Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, calling for the extension of his tenure. Paradoxically, the same people turned round to castigate Gen. Babangida when he was forced to step aside in 1993. Nigerians do not need a seer to tell rulers that such sycophants would be among those to cast the first stone(s) when they (the rulers) fall. After all, an adage has it that, “the hen says, when the bird of the air is being roasted, its (the hen’s) head aches because it thinks of the day it will grace the fire too.” As a matter of fact, presidents, governors, ministers, and all such top government officials as well as company executives do not have real friends; their so-called friends are actually friends of the offices, in the sense that the moment they vacate office, such persons will immediately gravitate to the next occupants of those offices. Unfortunately, many leaders have failed to learn from history.

The Nigerian approach to elections (in the case of civilians), or plots to overthrow a government in power, through coups (in the case of the military), show that politics is taken as a do-or-die affair. While there had been three unsuccessful attempts at civil democratic governments in Nigeria, there have been not less than ten military coup attempts. The country has been changing heads of state like a woman would change her wrappers. The consolation is that there is the general desire by Nigerians to engender peaceful transitions to help solidify the country’s nascent democracy.

5.5 The Political Context of *The Senator* and *Masterstroke*

It has been noted that films reflect the social, political, cultural, and technological developments of the producing country. Thus, it is necessary to examine the political process in Nigeria, to see how it is reflected to an extent in the selected films. In this study, the Nigerian political process is encapsulated in three stages, namely, *the search*, *the moment of decision*, and *the time for rebate*.

5.5.1 The Search

The search is the process of charting the road towards a political office in the sense that it is the time the idea is mooted and pursued vigorously. It is even possible that, sometimes, some persons who had had no political ambition are cajoled into joining the fray by followers or sycophants who believe that such a decision would be in their favour. This is the period campaigns for elective offices are carried out, and every means (diabolical or otherwise) is applied to achieve set objectives because of the belief that *the end justifies the means*. It is also interesting to note that this is the time when there are alignments and realignments.

Specifically, there were alliances and counter-alliances as at 1989 like The Awoists, League of Friends, The Federalists, The Nationalist Movement, Peoples Solidarity Movement, and so on. Ironically, as the inimitable politician, Chief K. O. Mbadiwe would say, *the men of timber and calibre* associated with most of these underground manoeuvres were some of the egregious politicians that ruined the economy in the Second Republic. It was apparent then to analytic minds that the Third Republic would be a rehash of the previous experiments and that premonition came to pass. The electioneering campaigns were exhibitions of naira power, thuggery or *fire-for-fire*, arson, slanders, unearthing of an opponent's secret past to undo him, and so on. Late Mallam Aminu Kano's political theory of "politics without bitterness" was totally ignored. Of interest is the fact that when Gen. Babangida disqualified (banned) some politicians, all they (the banned politicians) did was to field their children, younger brothers, or 'boys' in their stead. This was with the belief that they could still remotely run the affairs of such states. In old Rivers State, for instance, Chief Zebulon Abule gave way to Chief Francis Doukpolagha, while Chief Sergeant Awuse gave way to Chief Eric Aso.

Predictably, the Fourth Republic has been characterised by these multifarious hiccups because politicians seem not to have learnt from history. Terms like cross-carpeting, decamping, defecting, loyalty, sellable candidate, party faithful, harmonisation, and many more, have found their way into the

lexicon of contemporary Nigerian politics. It is true that one essential for any person seeking political office is that he/she has to be sellable, and this entails being credible. It is also true that in seeking political office, some political aspirants may be genuinely interested in rendering service to the people if elected into office. On the other hand, some may just be looking for how to survive; yet others may enter into the race, knowing fully well that they actually have no chance of getting elected but hope that they will be compensated (settled) if the party wins. This explains why President Obasanjo stated at the conclusion of the Ogun State gubernatorial primaries preparatory to the 2007 elections that, “there is enough on ground,” and that there was no need to fight (Solarin, 2006, p. 4).

Furthermore, as a political aspirant, one is seen as a stakeholder in the political landscape in the sense that one has an interest in the outcome of the political agenda. This term, first used exclusively as a business term, has been appropriated by politicians. Since one does not have permanent enemies in politics but permanent interests, those who have interests in certain issues or candidates often congregate to take far-reaching decisions. When a Nigerian becomes vociferous in social commentaries so that his/her voice could be heard by those in power, he/she is said to be seeking relevance. This is because he/she thinks he/she is an important person, and needs to be considered for appointment. The approach could be through virulent attacks or constructive criticisms of the government or ruling party; or it could be outright sycophancy depending on the status or antecedent of such a politician.

It is also necessary to mention that electioneering campaigns are carried out under registered political parties. Political parties have since been personalised (or privatised) in Nigeria through the formation of various campaign organisations. For a person to seek political office, he needs to have a personal campaign organisation within or preferably outside the party. This means that while the political party is the platform on which he runs for a political office, it is the campaign organisation made up of loyalists that really matters. This explains the existence of outfits, at one time or the other like the Obasanjo Campaign

Organisation, the Yar'Adua/Jonathan Campaign Organisation, the Atiku Campaign Organisation, the Buhari Campaign Organisation, and the Uzor Kalu Campaign Organisation, among others, in our political space.

One essential in this first stage is that the political aspirant ensures that there are structures on the ground. This refers to all those who support his/her aspiration: aides, thugs and hangers-on, in addition to material resources. These people are also on the pay-roll of the aspirant and they know it. Some of them act as moles in other structures in the same party, or the opposition, depending on the stage. If it looks like a politician's aspiration may not be met in one party, he moves into a more favourable party to actualise his political ambition. This is known as decamping, defecting or cross-carpeting. The question here is: Why does a politician decamp once he feels that short-changed? In the actual sense, decamping is the act of leaving one political party for another because of the feeling of discontent; it is an act that bothers on personal or selfish interests. Opposition leaders are lobbied to cross-carpet in fulfilment of the aphorism that, "If you can't beat them, join them." While it is true that decamping is not unheard of in other countries, it is the stock-in-trade of Nigerian political merchants. For example, in the run-up to the April 2007 elections, Chief (Mrs.) Sarah Jibril, the leader of Progressive Action Congress (PAC) and Owelle Rochas Okorochoa, the leader of Action Alliance (AA), were both in the PDP National Convention in Abuja on December 14, 2006, vying for the presidential ticket. Having failed, Okorochoa and Jibril quickly returned to their original parties, as presidential candidates. Similarly, Chief Uzor Orji Kalu, Governor of Abia State eventually left the ruling PDP to secure the presidential ticket of the Progressive Peoples' Alliance (PPA). Also, as vice-president, Alhaji Abubakar Atiku left the ruling PDP after protracted irreconcilable differences with President Obasanjo to clinch the presidential ticket of the Action Congress (AC).

Several other interesting analogies in the above light abound in the Nigerian political process. Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, the strongman of Ibadan politics, used to be in the then All Peoples'

Party (APP), decamped and became a kingmaker in the Oyo State chapter of the ruling PDP. Chief Don Etiebet of Akwa Ibom State used to be the chairman of All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP); but he decamped to PDP and became one of the top-notchers of the party. Chief Oluremi Adikwu-Bakare, who used to be a stakeholder in the Alliance for Democracy (AD) in Lagos State, cross-carpeted to PDP and then back to Alliance for Democracy (AD). At one point, she went into AC, then the Democratic Peoples' Alliance (DPA), before finally pitching her tent with the Progressive Peoples' Alliance (PPA). This was all happening in less than two months! Chief Francis Doukpolagha (Doukpola) was the ANPP candidate in Bayelsa State during the 1999 and 2003 gubernatorial elections. He took Chief DSP Alamieyeseigha, the winner of the 1999 elections, to court and the case dragged on for many years. Doukpola later defected and contested the Bayelsa State gubernatorial primaries under the platform of the PDP in 2006. In fact, with the choice of Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, as the presidential running mate to Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Jonathan recommended Doukpola as the PDP gubernatorial flag-bearer in Bayelsa State. Political analysts were in agreement that this was a dispassionate gesture, aimed at balancing the political equation in the state in favour of Bayelsa West Senatorial District, which, right from the old Rivers State, had not produced a governor. Unfortunately, the nomination was resisted in some quarters, thus making Doukpola to fruitlessly fight, perhaps, the last political battle of his life.

Incidentally, politicians, especially in the opposition camp, agitate for what they call a level playing field, which ordinarily means providing the enabling atmosphere for all contestants to have equal opportunity to be heard, to campaign, and win electoral votes. In reality, this does not exist in Nigeria. For example, as at 1998, Obasanjo was in jail when the party, PDP was formed. It is said that he eventually walked into the party's convention with ₦130 million, which he claimed, was given to him by "some people." The party's rules were set aside for him and he coasted home as the presidential nominee (Solarin, 2006, p. 4). Little wonder then that in the heat of his war of words

with President Obasanjo, Governor Orji Uzor Kalu alleged that he donated \$1 million to the presidential campaign fund in 1999 and that the cheque was lodged in a bank account belonging to Obasanjo Farms, an allegation that has since been consigned to history.

In the December 14, 2006 presidential primaries of the PDP, President Obasanjo virtually arm-twisted serving governors who had indicated interest, including Dr. Peter Odili of Rivers State, to step down for his preferred (anointed) candidate, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, the Executive Governor of Katsina State, to win the ticket. Umaru Yar'Adua is the younger brother of late Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, Obasanjo's Chief of Staff between 1976 and 1979, and who, as earlier noted, was implicated alongside Obasanjo in a phantom coup during the despotic Abacha regime. It would be recalled that Shehu Yar'Adua died in prison, under very mysterious circumstances, after having been allegedly poisoned by Abacha's hatchet men. Media reports have it that Dr. Peter Odili had deployed enormous resources, both human and material, in his campaign towards the primaries and was coasting to victory. It is believed that but for the underhand strategies, the bubble would have been burst on the scheme adopted by the presidency. The same scenario played out in the ANPP convention, where Governors Sani Ahmed Yerima of Zamfara State and Abba Bukar Ibrahim of Yobe State were cajoled to step down for Gen. Muhammadu Buhari.

Perhaps mention must be made of the emergent concept of generational politics, which is a phrase coined by some politicians under the age of 50 years in Nigeria's political scene. The young politicians claimed that the old politicians had failed the country, and so, they (the younger ones) should take charge of the leadership of the country. In 2001, they congregated under the aegis of the Progressive Action Movement (PAM), arguing that people under fifty years old had never ruled Nigeria. However, this is contrary to the position of Solarin, who argues that many of the pathologies which afflict Nigeria today are the handiwork of leaders in the past who were under fifty (Solarin, 2006, p. 3).

Another issue in the Nigerian political process is the question

of political violence. The ideology of politics without bitterness propagated by late Mallam Aminu Kano seems to have been consigned to the dustbin of history. The level of intolerance is such that lives are snuffed out of political opponents just to make the coast clear for such perpetrators. The guiding factor here, it seems, is the fear of losing in free and fair elections. This explains why the periods of electioneering campaigns offer ready employment for thugs and armed robbers. Politicians stockpile arms and provide gullible youths with lethal and sophisticated weapons to decimate the opposition. Once the elections are over, these youths are very often abandoned due to unfulfilled promises, and they expectedly fall back on the arms so acquired to carry out deadly armed robberies. This has been mentioned in chapter four during the discourse on the acquisition of arms and ammunition by armed robbers and political thugs.

5.5.2 The Moment of Decision

The moment of decision is the time the electorate decides who should rule; thus, it is the point of no return in the political process. This, of course, is after they have assessed the suitability of the various contestants. In the Nigerian context, election has become synonymous with the triumph of the highest bidder and a business of survival of the fittest. It explains why it is characterised by ubiquitous wars – war of words, war of the media, war of party thugs, war of youth wings or vanguards, war of naira, and war of rigging techniques. While chapters IV and V of the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999) stipulate the requirements for elections to the legislative and executive arms at the state and national levels, the reality is that elections are hardly fair in the sense that there are several electoral malpractices, namely, printing of fake ballot papers, duplication of ballot boxes, overvoting, snatching or vandalism of ballot boxes, falsification of election results, and sundry electoral violence to scare the opposition.

It is sad that for a few bank notes, Nigerians falsify election results, even if it is against their blood relations. There have been cases of overvoting, where votes cast are far more than

the registered voters. Since authenticated results change as soon as they leave the polling booths, it is usual for winners to say, “the election was free and fair,” while the losers allege that, “there was widespread rigging in the election.” This appears to underpin the position of Oronto Douglas that a forgotten past can become a threat to a problem-free future, and that people must not imprison their today and their tomorrow in the quest to overcome the problems of the past (Douglas, 2004, pp.1-10). Douglas observes that the country’s colonial past is most certainly not a pleasant one, so also are the experiences with successive governments that have taken over the mantle of leadership of the country since independence. He hinges the extent of underdevelopment in Nigeria on the dearth of representative government, stressing,

We have been through the rough and tough of life as a nation and many more challenges will come our way. The immediate challenge as we all know is how to ensure that when we vote our vote can be counted and the result of the count is allowed to prevail (sic). In the times past *okporoko* and salt were used to buy our votes. In today Nigeria stockfish has been made unnecessary as our votes can be taken at gunpoint. The challenge to those of us seated here is how to return to our communities and begin a debate as to how the ballot can be allowed to tell the true story of our democratic wishes and preferences (Douglas, 2004, p. 3).

It is generally believed that the June 12, 1993 election has been the freest and fairest in the political history of Nigeria. Paradoxically, this election which was perceived to have been won by Chief MKO Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was flagrantly annulled by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. The redeeming aspect of that occurrence was that he (Babangida) did not survive the conflagration precipitated by that invidious annulment. Sadly, that evil deed has been hovering over the political landscape like an ominous cloud, and Nigerians have been wary of transition programmes.

However, it is disconcerting that electioneering campaigns are characterised by thuggery while various malpractices feature

in the electoral process. Very often, fake ballot papers and customised ballot boxes are prepared by political adventurers. For instance, it was reported in the media that Chief Lamidi Adedibu, acclaimed strongman of Ibadan politics, was said to have had some Direct Data Imaging machines used by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for voters' registration in his possession (Alarape, 2007, p.1). The implication of this find was that the septuagenarian politician was doing an alternative voter registration exercise, presumably for the computation of fake election results. It was depressing that the culprit was left alone, a free man, carrying on with his politicking as the police and INEC traded words as to who should arrest or prosecute him. Furthermore, Adedibu claimed to have received an unreserved apology from Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu, the then arrowhead of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), thus corroborating the widespread view that he was among *the untouchables* in the Nigerian political arena. This was at a time every perceived opponent of the president was hounded by the EFCC and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), the perceived presidential watchdog.

There is no arguing the fact that fear is a common phenomenon in man. It is thus understandable that in spite of outward appearances, there is innate and palpable fear of failure in every political aspirant. The concern by political analysts, however, is why people would go the extra mile to ensure electoral victory. In the event of a likely unfavourable result, any perceived obstacle is bulldozed away and the highest bidder falsifies the figures. Unfortunately, the courts are not the best of places to quickly dispense with cases. For example, it took Mr. Peter Obi about three years to get judgement in his favour in order to reclaim his mandate to govern Anambra State. Obi contested the 2003 gubernatorial elections under the platform of the All Progressives' Grand Alliance (APGA) and was believed to have won. Somehow, Dr. Chris Ngige of the ruling PDP was declared winner, and Obi had to resort to the judiciary for justice to prevail. In other words, *one needs more than the patience of a patient dog to get justice in law courts.*

At this juncture, it is pertinent to expatiate on the concept of harmonisation, which is a process whereby stakeholders douse electoral tension. It is actually a situation whereby uncompromising positions are compromised and politicians soft-pedal after due negotiations. Such negotiated settlements include refund of campaign expenses, concessions regarding political offices, promises of political appointments, and so on. In the States Assemblies, gubernatorial, National Assembly, and presidential primaries preparatory to the 2007 elections, strong and credible contenders were harmonised out in favour of political sons and daughters. In the Imo State gubernatorial primaries, for instance, Chief Ifeanyi Ararume, who came first and ten other candidates, were dumped in favour of Chief Charles Ugwu. Ugwu was said to have come up a distant 12th, out of more than 25 candidates that were in the race. Obong Victor Attah, Executive Governor of Akwa Ibom State, was inclined to giving the gubernatorial ticket to his son-in-law, and only diffidently gave his blessing to Chief Godswill Obot Akpabio, who eventually emerged as the flag-bearer. Chief James Ibori, Executive Governor of Delta State ensured that Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan, his cousin and Secretary to State Government, was given the gubernatorial ticket for Delta State. These are just a few of the anecdotes of the happenings in the process of installing loyalists in offices in the current political experiment in Nigeria.

5.5.3 The Time for Rebate

When a person wins an election, it is his/her time for rebate. This is the time for the winners to enjoy, just as the losers count their losses. It is a time to lick wounds and think of how to keep the fire of opposition burning, as long as such persons have sustainable sources of income. Party loyalists are usually compensated with questionable appointments, while sycophants shout the praises of the rulers in a cacophony of voices, so that they would be noticed. Sometimes, this could start with battling to keep the mandate in the law courts because there have been reversals of supposed electoral verdicts in election tribunals. It is also a time to extend a hand of fellowship to the losers so that they would not be distracted by wasting valuable time and

resources to go to such election tribunals. Again, these negotiated settlements entail promises of contracts to offset campaign expenses, or appointments for the losers and some of the strong loyalists or supporters. It is also a time to wave the carrot in the face of the legislature so that one is not served impeachment notice for no just cause.

In the Second Republic, Alhaji Balarabe Musa, the Executive Governor of Kaduna State, was the first governor to be impeached. He had won the 1979 governorship elections under the platform of the Aminu Kano-led Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP) and contended briefly with the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN)-controlled legislature. The experience in the Fourth Republic has been like a whirlwind: Chief DSP Alamieyeseigha of Bayelsa State was impeached on December 11, 2005; Alhaji Rasheed Ladoja of Oyo State was sent packing on January 11, 2006; Adebayo Fayose of Ekiti State was the next victim on October 19, 2006; Peter Obi of Anambra State entered the record of unceremonious impeachments on November 2, 2006; while Joshua Dariye of Plateau State had his turn on November 13, 2006. As a point of fact, most of the impeachments were very absurd, generally believed to have carefully followed the scripted designs of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), under the leadership of Mallam Nuhu Ribadu. Most of them took the form of guerrilla warfare in the sense that they were plotted elsewhere and executed in the respective states under very tight security. Dissenting lawmakers were suspended for them to meet the constitutional provisions. In Plateau State, only six members in an Assembly made up of 24 lawmakers carried out the impeachment; and in Anambra State, the pro-impeachment legislators took refuge in Asaba, Delta State and returned from their base in the early hours of the morning on that fateful day and announced the impeachment. However, there was respite in some of the unceremonious impeachments because Ladoja of Oyo State, Obi of Anambra State, and Dariye of Plateau State had their impeachments voided by separate Courts of Appeal, and they reclaimed their mandates. Governor Obi even headed to the law courts again, arguing that since he assumed office

on March 11, 2006, his tenure should end on March 11, 2010. In tandem with the independence of the judiciary, the judges of the Supreme Court ruled in his favour on June 14, 2007, thus, terminating the tenure of Dr. Andy Ubah, who had assumed office as governor on May 29, 2007, under the platform of the ruling PDP.

The time for rebate, in the Nigerian experience, is also a period to plot to perpetuate one's self in office or bribe to legitimise tenure elongation. Once a candidate wins an election, it is believed in every quarter that he/she has *arrived*. It is time for celebration; it is time for congratulatory messages to pour in; it is also a time for courtesy calls (or solidarity visits) by political jobbers and even portfolio carrying elder statesmen and traditional rulers. It is the general expectation that the person has to recover all the money spent in the course of the electioneering campaigns, and that he/she has to also amass more money in foreign bank accounts for re-election campaigns or tenure elongation. Furthermore, ways of *choking* (dealing with) political opponents are mapped out even if it means accusing them of high treason. Communities that did not give their support at the earlier stages are dealt with or sidelined accordingly. This could be in not siting government projects in such communities, or not giving their sons and daughters political appointments. For strong supporters or those who worked for the candidate, it is a time of harvest. They can now afford to walk around town with raised shoulders, cause traffic hold up just to greet a friend, and talk boisterously in public places since it is their government. To them, any contract they get is a form of compensation so they just collect the mobilisation money, buy flashy cars, marry more wives, acquire chieftaincy titles, buy honorary doctorate degrees, and cap it with second burial ceremonies of long dead parents.

Take a scenario in the Second Republic when a governor visited a village to see if the people were enjoying the dividends of democracy. A stalwart politician had won a contract to provide the village potable water. His machination then was to give the governor the impression that the job had been completed and was being enjoyed by the people. With the influence of a

few Murtala notes (the ₦20 note), the hungry villagers were cajoled into carrying buckets of imported water in a procession with praise-songs in honour of the 'benevolent' governor, for providing them potable water. It is common knowledge that there are many contracts that have become white elephant projects due to this hydra-headed abandoned projects syndrome. This has been occasioned by the desire of some unscrupulous politicians to get a piece of the national cake from the federated account or the federal allocation. The federal allocation is Nigeria's contribution to the principles of federalism, and it is decided in the Federal Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC) meeting in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory every month. FAAC comprise, among others, the Honourable Ministers and Commissioners in charge of Finance, as well as the Accountants-General of the Federation and the States. Curiously, land mass is one of the derivation principles of Nigeria's revenue allocation; but the truth is that many of the states are not viable and cannot pay workers' salaries unless they receive the monthly federal allocation. These are states that were created by fiat by past military dictators, who wanted to favour their friends and relations, and not with the real intent of bringing government closer to the people. Thus, there are currently an army of bureaucrats in these states gulping billions from the federal allocation monthly, leaving very little or nothing for capital projects. Since most of the states cannot generate appreciable internally generated revenue (IGR) and are wholly dependent on the federal government that metaphorically holds the *feeding bottle*, workers bear the brunt as salaries are almost always owed every month. As it appears, the overdependence on the federal allocation, which is superintended from Aso Rock Villa, the seat of the Federal Government of Nigeria, will continue for yet a long time.

The local governments constitute the third tier of government in accordance with the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999), and chairmen are elected to run them. Ordinarily, the third tier of government is considered to be the closest to the people, and was supposed to provide services at the local government level such as building markets,

dispensaries, primary schools, small roads, water channels, and so on. Unfortunately, most of these chairmen are never on seat, hardly having any relationship with the local populace; they scarcely undertake meaningful development programmes in their council areas; and they only surface at the end of the month to share the monthly largesse. Furthermore, they are under the total control of the executive governors (or deputy governors), who often deduct large chunks from their monthly allocations through the Joint Accounts Allocation Committee (JAAC) to oil their political machinery.

It is in the light of the above that terms like 'settlement' and 'empowerment' came into play. Settlement, which dates back to the Gen. Ibrahim Babangida era, simply means that a politician has been given money to shut up his mouth. Once a politician is settled, he/she compromises his position. The dilemma of people like Tai Solarin (as Chairman of Peoples' Bank of Nigeria), Wole Soyinka (as Chairman of Federal Road Safety Commission), and Tam David-West (as Honourable Minister of Petroleum Resources), to mention a few readily come to mind. A compromised politician could say his benefactor is the only one who can do it! This is what Chief Arthur Nzeribe and his Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) stood for in the heydays of the despotic Abacha regime. This is coterminous with the failed tenure elongation crusade orchestrated for President Obasanjo in 2006. On the other hand, empowerment literally means to financially strengthen one's political ally. If one hears that a governor has empowered some people in Nigeria, it means that he has given them money or settled them through contracts. This is not in the sense of a community being empowered through the provision of amenities, such as roads, water, schools, cottage industries, health centres, and so forth. Rather than do that, those in elective office expect politicians they have empowered to deliver the votes from their wards or constituencies during elections.

Another thing that is of interest is that many a politician elected into office plots to perpetuate his/her tenure at whatever cost. There are various means of perpetrating that act: settlement, harassing political opponents, killing voices of

dissent, opening Swiss bank accounts, shady contract deals, globe-trotting, government house partying, raising false alarms, and many more. It is disturbing that there has been a litany of political assassinations right from the military dictatorships, thus making the political climate to be always hazy. There are many cases in point: the murder of the veteran journalist, Dele Giwa, in the infamous 1986 parcel bomb incident; the dastardly hanging of the human rights and environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and his nine Ogoni compatriots; the deaths of MKO Abiola, Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, and Tunde Idiagbon, widely believed to have been surreptitiously poisoned; the assassinations of elder statesman and National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) chieftain, Chief Alfred Rewane and Mrs. Kudirat Abiola, wife of MKO Abiola; and the near elimination of Chief Alex Ibru by purported agents of the Abacha junta, were some of the gruesome and callous cases of shedding of innocent blood during the military era.

In the face of several assassinations and unresolved killings in the political scene, the National Association of Seadogs (a.k.a. Pyrates Confraternity), in a statement signed by its Capone, Olatunde Makanju, had expressed concern about the disturbing trend of what the association rightly called, political terrorism. NAS noted that killings, assassinations, intimidation, and thuggery were closely associated with intolerant and unaccommodating dictatorships. The statement went further that,

The wanton and unwarranted silencing of contrarian views on national issues was at the root of the clamour for a disengagement of all forms of the aberration called military rule in Nigeria's political history. Nigerians of varying background both within our airspace and the Diaspora were united in the various campaigns that stampeded the military out of political and economic power. For this to be achieved, some of our citizens were executed in cold blood through trump up charges of treason, allegations of phantom coups in what was seen as a systematic elimination of unfavourable variants (Makanju, 2006, p. 1).

It was based on the above that the association called on Nigerians to show commitment in the bid to sustain the tenets of democracy because, the worst form of a democratic government remains centuries ahead of the best form of military misadventurism. It observed that the cult of military politicians (the militicians) stand out as the most professional, audacious and blood-thirsty users of this technique to steal political power – a sovereign asset of the people. To the association, this explained why, as Nigeria’s fledgling democracy was undergoing various forms of nurturing, the nation was again experiencing some of the most dangerous hangovers of militarism – political assassinations, which at best, was a form of terrorism (Makanju, 2006, p.2).

If people were concerned that military dictatorships witness various types of brutal killings, the current democratic experiment has not fared better. While it is usual that every government would not sit down and fold its hands when there are unwholesome attempts to “overawe it,” as President Obasanjo would say, several acts of suppression, repression, intimidation, and outright assassination, have increased the level of insecurity in the country. For example, from 1999 to date, Nigerians have been passing through retrogressive sponsorship of unwarranted bloodletting within the political class. More worrisome is the fact that all such political assassinations, across the length and breadth of Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones, have remained unresolved by the security agencies. To be specific, Bola Ige, then Attorney-General and Honourable Minister of Justice of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was murdered on December 23, 2001, within the confines of his home, protected and under guard by officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force. Still in the annals of political murders, Chief Marshall Harry, the national vice-chairman of ANPP (South-South zone), fell to the assassins’ bullets in Abuja, in March 2003. The nation was again jolted on February 6, 2004, when Chief Aminasoari K. Dikibo, a former PDP gubernatorial candidate from Rivers State, was assassinated while on his way to Asaba, Delta State, to attend a party meeting. Others brutally assassinated include, Capt. Jerry Agbeyegebe (Aviation Chief, Lagos State – October

12, 2004), Funsho Williams (PDP, Lagos State – July 27, 2006) and Ayodeji Daramola (PDP, Ekiti State – August 14, 2006). Commenting on these political assassinations, NAS stated thus:

Nigerians had not woken up from the coma imposed by the shockwaves of the cruel murder of Engineer Funso Williams, a famous aspirant to the seat of governorship of Lagos State, before the assassination of Dr. Ayodeji Daramola, another gubernatorial candidate in Ekiti State, was announced ... The two most recent brutal cases attest further to the tumultuous character of the Nigerian party-political space (Makanju, 2006, p. 2).

Incidentally, the above roll call is by no means exhaustive and precludes many failed assassination attempts. This explains why NAS described the trend in the country's political landscape as a tradition of terrorism:

When it is the breed of gangsters that are allowed the privilege of leadership, and felons and potential outlaws are free to brazenly display aspiration to rule decent citizens, the key methodologies of attaining their objectives must be passionately informed by their inclination, expertise and reasoning: murder, arson, thuggery, battering and all unimaginable norms of criminality. Terrorism, an all time horror, has remained a familiar strategy of actualising political ambition in the Nigerian society since independence (Makanju, 2006, pp. 2-3).

It is common knowledge that political killings and gangsterism are tools adopted only by those who seek to rule and despoil in politics and, definitely, not those who seek to lead and build:

It is a strategy to hijack the democratic process, an annexation and fraudulent conversion of democratic structures to the antagonistic family estate thereby annulling the majority wish of the people for self-serving purposes ... the moment a candidate or a group of party loyalists conspire to rig an election, a political terrorist act has been perpetrated against the people. Political terrorism is not only an infringement against the individual felled by the assassin's bullet or his immediate

family, it is equally an open, and a most unwholesome infringement against the collective psyche of the people (Makanju, 2006, p. 3).

It is true that the Federal Government has effectively played the role of the chief mourner at condolence visits to many of the bereaved, via the visible presence of the president, his deputy and/or other top government officials. At such moments, government promises consistently that justice would prevail, and that it would do everything possible to bring the culprits to book. For example, at the home of late Funso Williams, President Obasanjo was even more fervent in the usual pledge of making the perpetrators pay dearly. Incidentally, the general public has since learnt to disbelieve such vows because this form of statement has become a euphemism for the failure of the police and, indeed, government. Little wonder then that there is now a serious loss of confidence in the law enforcement agencies because people no longer trust the competence of the government to ensure security and justice in a country where the assailants of a serving Attorney-General and Honourable Minister of Justice are still enjoying freedom, probably fraternising with government and participating in governance many years after the heinous act. It is as if political assassination has been institutionalised. This underpins why NAS called on all politicians to put an end to these acts, as a matter of urgency, and spare the nation further loss of lives. It observed that justice remains the only instrument that can douse and assuage the psychosocial and political tension being generated by the raging political killings, and that anything short of this would remain “a grand national illusion and an international humiliation” (Makanju, 2006, p. 3).

5.6 Film and Politics

Having taken a critical look at the Nigerian political process, the issue that needs to be examined now is the interplay between film and politics. The point has been made earlier that every film is a representation of the economic, social, political, religious, cultural, and technological developments of the producing country. This is why Noel King, in analysing the

relation between film and politics, states that in a broad sense, a cinema of political experience can be expected to deploy realistic characterisation and narrative structure, and that there is need to conceive of politics as an element of the world waiting to be pictured or represented:

The cinema of political experience understands politics as “subject-matter” and makes its calculations in terms of how accurately and persuasively it pictures political events or adequates a subject’s political experience. One consequence of such a cinematic practice is that the viewer is conceived as an experiencing subject ... a subject awaiting politicisation by empathy (King, 1992, p. 2).

In further explicating the above, King quotes Tony Bennett (1987) as remarking that,

not all practices of textual commentary acquire their social effectivity by organising the reader as a subject who takes a meaning from the text with subsequent consequences for his or her consciousness and mode of relating to and acting within a generalised public arena. Others do so by producing the reader as an agent who performs a practice within specific institutional domains to become the bearer of specific certificated competences (as cited in King, 1992, p. 2-3).

According to King, the notion of a cinema of political experience contrasts to a cinema of political address, which operates on the assumption that the domain of the political does not exist independently of a set of apparatuses, techniques and practices, amongst which one finds cinematic techniques. In this understanding of the relationship between film and politics, cinema is itself treated as a material mechanism capable of various insertions in political domains. The cinema of political address does not try to evoke the experience of these domains (thereby effecting a politicisation of the viewing subject by way of the category of experience), but rather concentrates its attention on the relation between itself as an institution (a set of techniques and practices) and those it addresses.

In examining film culture, politics and industry, with specific reference to India, Srinivas observes that, “film consumption is linked to politics on the one hand and the film industry on the other” (Srinivas, 2003, p.1). He argues that the promise of democracy, whether or not it is realised, is what makes the cinema political. In taking a critical look at the star system, Srinivas states that not only do film stars address spectators in rather direct ways (including looking at the camera), but they seem to perform according to the demands of the audience. He notes that the sound of whistling oftentimes starts a few seconds before stars make their first and much anticipated appearance as if by whistling viewers can summon them (the stars) to appear. This, according to Srinivas, is an inversion – viewers have been trained over the years to anticipate the action just as the stars have been trained over the years to perform to viewers’ expectations (Srinivas, 2003, p. 3). Consequently, he submits that film culture is political for two reasons:

It is founded on a democratic promise and it develops around the notion of spectatorial rights. I not only have a right to be present in the cinema hall but have the further right to make demands of the narrative, the star, etc. The cinema has to acknowledge my presence and address my expectations (Srinivas, 2003, pp. 3).

There is no arguing the fact that over the years, Hollywood films have continued to reflect American way of life – politically, economically, socially, culturally, technologically, and so forth. Douglas Kellner, for instance, posits that popular films intervene in the political struggles of the day, in the same way that films produced in the 1960s advanced the agenda of the New Left and the counterculture. According to Kellner, the Hollywood film, like the American society, should be seen as “a contested terrain and that films can be interpreted as a struggle of representation over how to construct a social world and everyday life” (Kellner, n.d., p.1). He is of the view that reading Hollywood films of the 1960s politically allows one to anticipate the coming of Ronald Reagan and the New Right to power by demonstrating that conservative yearnings were ever more popular within the culture and that film and popular culture helped to form an

ideological matrix more hospitable to Reagan and conservatives than to embattled liberals (Kellner, p.1).

Perhaps, this is where the concept of ideology comes into play. Ideology, as Kellner notes, refers primarily to those ideas that legitimise the class rule of the capitalist ruling class. It is those sets of ideas that promote the capitalist class's economic interests. However, Kellner is quick to warn that reducing ideology to class interests makes it appear like the only significant domination going on in society is class, or economic domination. He argues that gender and race oppression are real, and so, of fundamental importance, and indeed, are intertwined in fundamental ways with class and economic oppression. This is why he proposes that any discourse on ideology should be extended to interrogation of theories, ideas, texts, and representations that legitimise domination of women and racial groups (Kellner, pp. 2-3).

Taking a cue from this perspective, it can be said that engaging in ideological critique involves criticising sexist and racist ideologies as well as bourgeois-capitalist ideology. Furthermore, undertaking an ideological critique involves analysing images, symbols, myths, and narratives as well as propositions and systems of belief. This underpins Kellner's position that while some contemporary theories of ideology explore the complex ways that images, myths, social practices, and narratives are bound together in the production of ideology, others restrict ideology to propositions stated discursively in texts. Against this restrictive notion, he argues that ideology contains discourses and figures, concepts and images, theoretical positions, and myths. Such an expansion of the concept of ideology obviously opens the way to the exploration of how ideology functions within popular culture and everyday life, and how images and figures constitute part of the ideological representations of sex, race, and class in film and popular culture. To substantiate his position, Kellner carries out an ideological criticism of *Rambo* (1985), noting that simply attacking the militarist or imperialist ideology of the film is not enough; rather, an argument should be made for the fact that the militarism and imperialism implicit in the film serve capitalist

interests by legitimising intervention in such places as South-East Asia, Central America or wherever. He states that one would also have to criticise its sexism and racism to carry out a full ideological critique, showing how representations of women, men, the Vietnamese, the Russians, and so on, are a fundamental part of the ideological text of *Rambo*. According to him, this requires analysing how the dimensions of class, gender, race, and imperialist ideology intersect in the film, reproducing rightist ideologies of the period (Kellner, p. 3).

As it were, *Rambo* is one of a whole series of “return-to-Vietnam films.” All the works in this film movement follow the same formula of representing the return to Vietnam of a team of former veterans, or a superhuman, superhero veteran like Rambo, to rescue a group of American soldiers “missing in action” who are still imprisoned by the Vietnamese and their evil Soviet allies. The film synthesises this “return to Vietnam” cycle with another cycle that shows returning veterans transforming themselves from wounded and confused misfits to super warriors. All of these post-Vietnam syndrome films show the United States and the American warrior hero victorious this time and thus exhibit a symptom of an inability to accept defeat. They also provide symbolic compensation for loss, shame, and guilt by depicting the United States as good and this time victorious; while its communist enemies are represented as the incarnation of evil who this time receive a well-deserved defeat (Kellner, pp. 3-6). This position affirms the same point that had been made earlier in chapter one.

Cumulatively, the return-to-Vietnam films exhibit a defensive and consolatory response to military defeat in Vietnam and an inability to learn the lessons of the limitations of the power of the United States and the complex mixture of good and evil involved in almost all historical undertakings. In other words, although the United States was denied victory in Vietnam, it has attempted to achieve it in popular culture through the cinema screen. This phenomenon shows some of the political functions of popular culture, which include “providing compensations for irredeemable losses while offering reassurances that all is well in the American body politic” (Kellner, p. 6).

In an analysis of the political imperative of cinema in Nigeria, Okome acknowledges the relative successes of Latin American filmmakers like Julio Garcia Espinosa and Miguel Littin in using the film medium to make incisive political statements, noting with dismay that the Nigerian filmmaker fights shy of his political self, not taking advantage of the medium's potency as a tool for enhancing national growth and cohesion. According to Okome, unlike the significant role played by the print media, the film medium did not help in the political struggle for Nigeria's independence, and is not contributing meaningfully to the political history of the country. He states further that,

Still suffering from the vestiges of colonialism and saddled with a festering political situation, the Nigerian filmmaker vacillates between the mere glamorisation of aspects of Nigerian culture and the uncritical portrayal of some dim historical past, producing in the final analysis films that are politically innocuous and culturally patronising (Okome, 1995a, p. 73).

However, through an analysis of films like *Ajani Ogun* (Balogun, 1976), *Ija Ominira* (Balogun, 1982), *Kongi's Harvest* (Davies, 1970), *Blues for a Prodigal* (Soyinka, 1984), *Vendor* (Ladebo, 1985), and *The Mask* (Ugbomah, 1979), among others, Okome identifies the works of Ola Balogun, Wole Soyinka, Eddie Ugomah, and Ladi Ladebo, as being more engaging and politically inspiring.

It is in the light of the foregoing that a critical study will now be undertaken on how some Nigerian filmmakers have directed their energies and creative imaginations toward portraying the country's political situation in films. The idea is to establish the effectiveness of such attempts. This is of peculiar interest because, as mentioned in the analysis of the generic trend, the political genre has not received serious attention by filmmakers before now, probably because of the economic considerations and the exigencies of the political landscape. Stories reflecting political issues appeared not to offer attraction, until the demise of the maximum ruler, Gen. Sani Abacha; that was when *The Stubborn Grasshopper* was released. The success

of this work seemed to have provided the impetus for the foray into political themes, as seen in *The Incumbent*, *His Majesty*, *King Makers*, *Queen of Hasso Rock*, *Executive Crime*, and many more.

5.7 A Critical Reading of *The Senator*

The Senator (2003) is a two-part film produced and directed by Teco Benson for TFP Productions. Since his entrance into Nollywood in 1994, first as an actor, Teco (as he is popularly called) has carved a niche for himself as an action-movie director, starting with *Waterloo* (1997). He has also directed several Christian films for Helen Ukpabio's Liberty Gospel Ministries Films, including the highly acclaimed *The Price* (1999), starring Richard Mofe-Damijo and Eucharia Anunobi. Some of his credits include *Power to Bind* (1998), *Scores to Settle* (1998), *Suicide Mission* (1998), *End of the Wicked* (1999), *Narrow Escape* (1999), *Executive Crime* (2000), *Highway to the Grave* (2000), *Holy Crime* (2000), *State of Emergency* (2000), and *Wasted Years* (2000). Others worth mentioning are *Broad Daylight* (2001), *False Alarm* (2001), *Grace to Grass* (2001), *War Front* (2004), and *Explosion* (2006).

The Senator (Benson, 2003), one of the few films that reflect the Nigerian political process, portrays the innate desire and smart approach of a young boy, Larry, to actualise his lifelong ambition of becoming a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Right from high school, young Larry (played by Young Ujah) learns in a typical Machiavellian way that, "the end justifies the means," which explains why he uses the instrument of blackmail consistently to get whatever he wants. He capitalises on the amorous acts of his mother (Rachael Oniga) and father (Laz Ekwueme) as instruments of blackmail to collect money from them to take care of his financial needs. Paradoxically, the loving side of Larry is also portrayed as he gives the money he collects from his mother to Mike (Johnpaul Nwadike), whose girlfriend, Linda (Grace Amah), had become pregnant, and so, needed money to procure an abortion. When Linda dumps Mike for another boy, Piccolo, Larry again blackmails Linda by threatening to reveal to her mother and the principal of the school that at a very young age, she had

already committed abortion. Piccolo becomes his next victim for befriending Linda, and the evidence he (Larry) uses to confront him is an armed robbery operation he (Piccolo) had earlier carried out. His strategy works because it forces the poor girl to go back to Mike.

As the story progresses, Larry and Mike gain admission into the university and the whole game continues as Larry uses threats and blackmails to have his way. Typical of his loving and committed nature, Larry (now played by Hanks Anuku) protects the interest of his friend, Mike (now played by Emeka Okoro). While they are in the university, Larry comes to the rescue of Mike when the leader of the Black Belt cult group, Jasper (David Nwajei), starts going after Mike's girlfriend, Rose (Nkiru Abazie), and threatens that he would bathe her with acid if she refuses his sexual advances. An open threat from Jasper makes Larry to decide to take the war to the cult group in line with the belief that the best form of defence is to attack. Larry makes Mike to realise that it is better for a man to die fighting than to cry in his grave, and that they needed to acquire guns to face the cultists on campus. Thus, Larry and Mike take the fight to the hideout of the Black Belt cult group in the bush, late in the night, and kill Jasper and three others.

Subsequently, Larry is faced with the problem of making Mike to pass his exams in the Department of Sociology, since they were admitted to read different courses, and he cannot help him as it obtained in their secondary school days. To achieve his objective, Larry contracts an intelligent classmate of Mike, Magnus (Desmond Elliot) to help write the exams. The agreement is that they will pay one thousand naira per paper which comes to the sum of eight thousand naira for the eight papers, and that they will pay half before the exams, and half after passing the exams. Complications set in after the fifth paper as the invigilator catches Desmond and Mike, thereby making Mike to fail the remaining three papers. To ensure that Mike passes all his exams and graduates, Larry blackmails Mike's lecturers, beginning with the Head of Department, Professor Adigun (Festus Aguebor), who had killed a colleague that had keenly contested the headship of the department with him.

As the plot unfolds, Larry meets a brick wall in Dr. Mrs. Eunice Okoro (Amaka Ezeonwukwe), in their final year. He records her husband on camera asking an orange seller out and brings the tape to her, thinking that it will make her accede to his request that she should help to pass Mike in her course. Unknown to Larry, Mrs. Okoro had been looking for strong grounds to divorce her husband for about ten years and he (Larry) had just provided her a concrete evidence to do so. Unperturbed by the glaring evidence of her husband's infidelity, she rather taunts Larry that the most elementary lesson of blackmail lies in knowing what your victim does not want revealed, and that he had not planned his strategy very well. In a flashback, Larry recalls his father's warning, prior to his admission into the university, that sooner or later, he will meet someone who will not shift ground. Angry that the woman is obstinate, Larry assassinates her.

It is interesting to note that Larry's friend, Mike, tags along with him like his shadow right through high school, and the university, and upon graduation, it continues as adults. While Larry proceeds to do a Masters programme after their graduation, Mike opts to go into supply business since he does not have the intellectual ability for postgraduate studies. Larry dissuades him from the supply business on the ground that one is owed payments for years; thus, they agree to enter into partnership and look for contracts in the construction industry. On getting vital information that National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) is awarding the Obanikoro building contract, which Julius Berger is likely to get, Larry visits the Chairman of the Tenders Board, Alhaji Bamanga (Michael Adingi), and blackmails him into reawarding the contract within one week to their company, Tin Can Ventures. The damning evidence is a printout of the Alhaji's several foreign Swiss bank accounts, which run into millions of dollars. To secure the necessary funds to execute the contract, Larry again blackmails a bank manager (Val Nwigwe) to get a thirty million naira loan facility without the necessary collateral. The manager capitulates out of fear because Larry confronts him with evidence that he is a fake "Toronto graduate" who had smartly married the governor's

daughter, and so, cannot afford a scandal of such magnitude.

In another sequence, Larry faces a heavier business challenge when Mike informs him about a contract for the construction of the Bakassi-Ikom Road, worth five hundred million naira. In line with his *modus operandi*, he visits the NNPC Director of Finance (Tony Ezimadu), and blackmails him with the murder of his female lover, Rosa Martins, who had attempted to blackmail him to the tune of five hundred thousand dollars. Reflective of the soap opera tradition, the first part of the film ends on a suspended note, as Larry confronts the Director with photographs of the murder.

The story continues in Part 2, as Larry is seen tightening the noose around the NNPC Director by disclosing that he had a video recording of the criminal act. He threatens that he will not only tell his wife, but that he will also go to the Police. He instructs the Director to influence the award of the Bakassi-Ikom Road contract to their company or risk going to jail. When the Director reports back later that one of the Board members, Professor Oyewale Banjo (T.J. Morgan), is defiant, maintaining that the contract can only be awarded to them, “over his dead body,” Larry visits him to make a passionate appeal. The gesture fails to make any impression on Professor Banjo, and Larry double crosses him on the road and assassinates him and his driver.

After completing the Masters degree programme, Larry goes on to do a doctorate degree in the Eastern University as part of his political agenda of becoming the Senate President. However, things take a fortuitous turn with the sudden death of the military Head of State (apparently inferring supposedly to the demise of Gen. Sani Abacha in 1998). The next military junta that takes over power signals some hope in the sense that the new Head of State promises that within a year, he is going to hand over power to a democratically elected government. This gives room for politicking and it dawns on Larry that it is high time he gets into active politics. The first incredible thing he does in this direction is to ask to be quickly awarded the doctorate degree, when he had just spent 14 months, and still had 18 months left to complete the programme. To actualise this, he again uses

the same instrument of blackmail and succeeds because the evidence he uses to confront Professor Onyeama (Philip Okpoko) is that in his bid to become the Dean, he had visited a native doctor and sacrificed his father as requested by the medicine man.

Larry eventually joins the P.E.P. to run in Lagos State but quickly changes his mind when the position of Senate President is zoned to the East, and for purposes of eligibility to contest, he adds six more years to his age. With Mike as his Campaign Manager, he plots his strategy, going to his home village to cultivate the right political atmosphere. He schemes in his usual way and gets the endorsement of the Igwe (Mike Manafa) of his community, gets a chieftaincy title, and crowns it by forcing Chief Nicholas Uwakwe (Enebeli Elebuwa) to step down for him. The grounds for the blackmail are that Chief Uwakwe's son is involved in drug-related offences in the United States, while his daughter, Daphne Ifeoma Uwakwe, is a commercial sex worker in Milan, Italy. The road eventually becomes clear for Larry to coast to victory, not only as a Distinguished Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, but very likely the Senate President.

Of importance to one in this film is the convenient way in which the story is managed, from the way Larry moves from one blackmail to another or eliminates perceived opponents, especially the old politician, Chief Uwakwe, who had underrated him. Within this period, Larry also traces his background and finds out that his grandfather had been confined to the evil forest when he incurred a debt while trying to sponsor his father to school in Onitsha. The poor man was wrongly accused of being a thief and was strangled, ostracised, and buried in the evil forest. When his father who saw the criminal act reported the case, nobody believed the word of a six-year-old child. So, that was how the story of his grandfather's burial in the evil forest stayed for about fifty-five years before his going into politics and going into the root of the matter. Having found out what actually happened to his grandfather, Larry conveniently blackmails the grandson of one of the persons who committed the crime and makes him confess to the Igwe that his own

grandfather had confessed to him. This confession clears all barriers that his questionable background would have placed upon him. Having set the records straight, the Igwe is then free to instal him as a red-cap chief. The implication here is that the way becomes clear for Larry and he eventually begins to plot his way to the Senate as he had always felt at the tender age of 14.

Teco Benson calls *The Senator* (2003) a political explosion; but one would rather qualify it as a morality tale on the current style of politicking in Nigeria. It portrays the type of politics that is built on character assassination, blackmail, and elimination of opponents, among other vices. Incidentally, the plot of the film is very thin in the sense that there is nothing substantial apart from the instruments of blackmail which Larry uses from one victim to the other. In terms of structure, the usual trend in advanced film cultures is to handle crime stories in such a way that the criminal is brought to book, no matter how smart the person may be, so that the viewer achieves a certain level of purgation at the end of the film. This is not the case here because Larry is not punished at the end of the film.

The film portrays a society where vices like crime and blackmail are more or less glorified. At least, this is the impression that one gets, since Larry is not brought to book at the end of the story in spite of all his high level of criminality. It will be recalled that he gives Mike money for Linda to procure abortion, and mercilessly murders Jasper and three other cultists, in addition to Mrs. Okoro and Prof. Adigun, all in the bid to have his way. Furthermore, to achieve his life-long political ambition, he has to blackmail his parents, Linda, Piccolo, university lecturers, Alhaji Bamanga, the "Toronto graduate" bank manager, the NNPC Director and Chief Uwakwe, among others. Ironically, Larry is not brought to book because the film ends with himself and his friend celebrating. Most crime stories are usually morality tales in which the criminals are brought to book and punished. Rather than follow this structure, the criminal is let off the hook, which subtracts from the whole story.

Secondly, the film exposes most of the intrigues employed by politicians against their opponents, except that other dimensions of the character of Larry are not really exploited. He is never

found indulging in other activities, for example, drinking, meeting with political associates, going to the party secretariat, campaigning for the elections, and so on. Also, he is never seen dating any girl throughout the story; rather, he is always quarrelling with his friend for being a Casanova. It is understandable that his parents want him to get married immediately after getting a doctorate degree. Put simply, what creates the kind of dysfunctional personality in the character of Larry, the protagonist, is not really understood. The character is quite dysfunctional because the only thing that gives him pleasure is when he is blackmailing or killing people, unlike Mike who expresses frustration at all these things. The fact is that when a person commits a crime, naturally, some kind of nervousness is expected, which is not the case with Larry. He never shows any sign of nervousness because it is only when he is committing a major crime (or after) that he becomes extremely calm and calculative.

Another aspect in the film which is quite problematic is the fact that somebody who is as criminal-minded and self-centred as Larry would carry his friend along throughout in life, because that is what happens in the film. He protects Mike throughout high school, throughout their university education, and even as adults. Mike is presented as his alter-ego or his dark side to the extent that he cannot separate himself from Larry. He does not seem to have his own life and does not also marry like him. So, the kind of lifestyle on which the story is anchored is somehow artificial and is not in conformity with the principles of verisimilitude. The only family life in the film is that of Larry's parents; and even at that, their personalities are also not fully developed. For instance, what Larry's mother does for a living is not known; but it could be deduced that his father works in an office. However, the nature and background of that office are not examined. It is also clear that Larry's father went to the university because he stated that he did the mandatory National Youth Service. This much is gathered from the background information which his father gives to the effect that his grandfather swore that what his own great-grandfather could not fulfil, he was going to fulfil by training him (Larry's father).

Besides that, very little is known about the family, except the fact that his great-grandfather was wrongly accused, murdered and confined to the evil forest. At the beginning of the film, Mike and his girlfriend pay a visit to Larry's home and his mother confronts Larry when he is referred to as "the Senator". Outside of that first visit, other family friends are hardly seen visiting the Onuigbos. For a family of that kind of social standing, this seems strange. Apparently, the production has been conditioned by the film practices inherent in Nollywood.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the intrigues of Larry, in his attempt to fulfil his dream of becoming not only a Senator but the Senate President, sustain the story. Though Nigeria may be seen as a country where just anything goes, it is a little bit off-handed to write a story that seems to be a one-way track, in which Larry commits all sorts of crimes and gets away with all of them. The only time he thinks is when his attempt at blackmailing Dr. Mrs. Okoro fails and he recalls the voice of his father warning him that one day he might come across somebody who would not want to shift ground and he would realise that in life he cannot have his way always. So, in terms of narration, the plot is quite linear, and the few flashbacks are more of blackmail materials which show why the victims are vulnerable.

Somehow, it is curious that Larry seems to know the past crimes of people before he gets to the spot and there is nothing to tell us how he got that power of clairvoyance. Questions as to how he got to know that his mother was dating a family friend, that his father was dating his secretary, that Professor Adigun killed his colleague, that Dr. Mrs. Okoro's husband is flirting with a mere orange seller, and that Professor Onyeama killed his father for a ritual, are all begging for answers. The exception here may be the classified information on the children of Chief Uwakwe because he actually called a friend to investigate and send him the findings through a courier service. Larry is also fond of recording scenes, as seen in his blackmail of Alhaji Bamanga and the sequence dealing with the village land dispute. Incidentally, it is not established, for instance, when he actually recorded Chief Okoro's picking and sleeping with

the orange seller, and the Dean's killing of his father, and beheading and burying the headless body. Even though one agrees to willingly suspend the sense of disbelief when opting to watch this film, the fact remains that many aspects of the plot lack believability.

In terms of thematic preoccupation, *The Senator* centres on blackmail as an instrument of political advancement. Basically, this is the type of politicking that characterise most African countries, not just Nigeria, because the political terrain is replete with questionable characters, people who are prepared to engage in all kinds of projects in order to achieve their selfish aims. The film portrays Machiavellian schemes employed by Larry to achieve his political ambition. Larry grows up with a compelling dream to become a Senator and works assiduously towards it; and like many politicians, he is very ruthless and would not hesitate to destroy any obstacle that comes his way. Larry's parents, like most parents, do everything possible to put him on the path of morality because his mother keeps reminding him that it is not advisable to use the instrument of blackmail to extract services, or as a way of asking for a favour. His father also keep reminding him that if he continues using blackmail as an instrument for achieving his goal in life, he will one day come across somebody who would not want to shift ground and that it is going to greatly affect his ambition. It is thus not a matter of coincidence that this is confirmed in his encounter with Dr. Mrs Okoro who refused to be blackmailed. In other words, his extermination of Jasper, Dr. Mrs Okoro, Professor Banjo, and his driver, all show his resolve to overcome every opposition. Added to the above is the series of blackmails he masterminds all in the bid to achieve his ultimate aim.

The problems of examination malpractice and cultism in educational institutions are also highlighted in the film. Larry writes exams for his friend, Mike, right from their secondary school days, and on gaining admission into the university to read different courses, Larry arranges Magnus, a clever sociology student to help write exams for Mike. He also goes to the extent of meeting lecturers to ensure that Mike passes his exams to graduate. When he meets a brick wall in the person of

Dr. Mrs. Eunice Okoro, he assassinates her. The point here is that though Mike manages to graduate due to the assistance which Larry gives him, he is definitely a half-baked graduate, like hundreds of thousands that the country's university system is churning out every year. The filth in the academic system is further highlighted as Larry sets out to get his doctorate degree in just 14 months, when he has up to 18 months to complete the programme. While the Dean says the institution does not award "Toronto degrees," he capitulates under Larry's threat of blackmail. The recurring decimal here is the rot in boardroom politics and even citadels of learning. People believe that once you are in a position of authority, you have made it; so, they do everything possible to get there.

On the other hand, the menace of cultism is one that our university administrators are yet to come to grips with. The problem has reached such an extent that Students' Union elections in the nation's campuses are usually bloody affairs. The fight for supremacy among the various campus cult groups has become so intense that girls too have thrown their hats into the ring by forming all-female cult groups like, "Daughters of the Forest," "Forest Virgins," "Black Braziers," and so on. In *The Senator*, the leader of the Black Belt cult group, Jasper, lives like a king on campus and believes that he can date any girl any time. It thus becomes an affront to him when he finds out that Mike is going out with Rose, a girl he planned to ask out for a date. To assert his authority, he warns Mike to steer clear of the girl or he would be a dead man. Unfortunately, the cultists underrate the ability of Larry who takes the war to them, assassinates Jasper and three others, setting them in disarray. Though it is not explored, there is no doubt that such killings definitely precipitate reprisal attacks from such aggrieved cult groups.

In another breath, the film also explores the sexual excesses of Nigerians. Firstly, Larry capitalises on the extramarital pleasures of his parents to blackmail them. Secondly, he uses the illegal abortion of Linda to blackmail her and force her into returning to Mike after she dumps him for Piccolo. Thirdly, he attempts to use the sexual escapades of Chief Okoro to blackmail

his wife, Dr. Mrs. Okoro, but fails, as the woman is very much aware of her husband's base nature, and was actually waiting for concrete evidence to sue him for divorce. Fourthly, Mike is presented as a person who cannot control his sexual urge; to him, he has to occupy himself with young beautiful girls because Larry drives him crazy with his criminal silence. Finally, Larry hounds Chief Uwakwe to step down, using his daughter's involvement in prostitution as the instrument of blackmail.

In the area of characterisation, it can be posited that Larry (Hanks Anuku) is in certain ways, a loving and generous person, with respect to his life-long assistance to his friend, Mike. He loves Mike, whom he says, is a very special friend and he does everything to carry him along. He helps Mike and Linda with the money (which he obtains from his mother through blackmail) to procure an abortion. He also helps Mike to get back Linda from Piccolo, and to write his exams throughout their school days. He equally frees him from the fangs of the campus cultists and saves him the embarrassment of rustication from school for inability to pass his exams. This is a trait that is very rare in Nigerians who always look at what they stand to gain in return for any favour, in line with the popular parlance that, "you use what you have to get what you want." Nonetheless, the character of Larry seems to be totally dysfunctional as it lacks depth; he just moves from one crime to another emotionlessly. Right from his high school days, he does not like competing with any person, not even with his friend, Mike. The moment Mike attempts to take things for granted by requesting that they should change positions in the class so that he, Mike, would take the first position in their exams the next time, Larry puts him in his proper place by making him fail in the exams. This teaches Mike a hard lesson, and makes him remain subordinate to Mike in their relationship. He does not have emotions in the way he kills and he does not seem to have any feeling regarding the way he talks about other people. The only persons who are shocked by this are just his father and Mike.

Mike (Emeka Okoro), on the other hand, is a dullard, who clings to the apron-strings of Larry. He knows that he cannot pass his exams without the assistance of Larry, so he submits

himself totally to Larry's whims and caprices, especially when his suggestion that they should swap positions does not go down well with Larry and he decided to put him where he rightly belongs. Mike also depends on Larry to get out of his love tangles. He gets Linda back because Larry blackmails her and Piccolo. He also follows Larry to carry the gang war to Jasper and his fellow cultists, thus saving his neck. He also depends on Larry to clear obstacles in their business endeavours and he accords Larry respect as the senior partner in their friendship and business engagements. Coincidentally, like Larry, Mike is not seen in a family set-up; so, nothing is known about his background. All that is established is that he likes the company of beautiful girls; he believes that women serve as a recipe to kill boredom and goes for them any time he has the opportunity.

However, one fascinating aspect of this film is Larry's attraction to cameras. This seems to give the impression that he understands the power of the camera to control people's destiny, to screen their views of the world. It is common knowledge that when one uses the camera to shoot, what one shoots is not the truth (or reality) but a reflection of the truth (or reality); and with that, one can extract a lot of views on what is shot; and that is what Larry does. He is seen doing it a few times; and most of the times, the report of what he has done is given. For instance, he hides behind shrubs and other objects from where he takes shots of victims. He does it while the NNPC Director is strangling his girlfriend, and then when the enemy of a family in the village is shooting a victim in the farmland. The camera, in that sense, becomes a mimick replica for the camera that is telling the story. It can be presumed that the camera which is there, recording the various scenarios, is almost like the omniscient camera, the eye of God, working and watching over the people. Furthermore, all the crimes committed are recorded so that they can be reported at some point in time in the story. That is the only way one can explain his claim to gaining an insight over people's past crimes beyond the ordinary and using them against such victims.

There is really nothing significant or symbolic about the use of costumes. For instance, at the beginning of the film, Larry

wears jeans, and the jeans become more rugged when they enter the university; but towards the end of the film, he changes to the typical agbada dressing of the political class. Symbolically, his wardrobe has changed towards the end of the film to reflect his political status. Unfortunately, nothing significant is found in his university days as there is no conscious attempt to represent peculiar undergraduate life. The only thing used in representing it is the cult war, which he fights and the blackmails he perpetrates to protect Mike's interest. Apart from these, there is nothing to reflect peculiar academic and social life in the university.

In the final analysis, it is evident that, to a large extent, the production context in Nollywood is reflected in the production of *The Senator*. For example, the cast is very few for purposes of financial manageability; and the locations are also not complex in the area of production design. However, the location of a shrine by the wall of a mud building, where Professor Onyeama consults the medicine man, shows that the production design was not handled painstakingly. In the flashbacks relating to the ritual sacrifice of Professor Onyeama's father, the professor is seen with the native doctor in a shrine located beside the wall of a mud hut by the roadside. This is not realistic, especially when it is a shrine where human heads are presented for ritual purposes. Incidentally, there are many mud houses in the scene, so it is surprising that the producers could not approach owners of one of those houses to locate the shrine inside. As a matter of fact, setting the shrine in a room would have made a whole lot of difference considering the red cloth put against the wall which is adorned with gold and fantastic ornaments of carvings. All of those things could have been set in one of the mud houses rather than having a shrine by the roadside. Arguably, nobody in Africa would locate a shrine by the roadside, where human heads are used for ritual sacrifices. Certainly, such a shrine would be located inside a house that would have secret rooms or located in the bush.

The palace of the Igwe is also not well designed because the throne is just positioned at the dining section of a sitting room. From a long shot of the throne, two windows are seen on either

side, just covered with blinds, which is not believable in any way. The design of the palace is not befitting the status of a monarch, who is said to be very wealthy and could not be bought with money to endorse the candidature of Larry. It can be argued that this is a travesty of the revered Igbo traditional institution. Igbo monarchs love power; they treasure ornamentation, and the throne could reflect this, probably with lion or other animal skins, carvings and designs of all kinds to show that the Igwe is rich, to confirm what Larry had said. Furthermore, the building is an ordinary bungalow, not a one-storey building; and there are no chiefs in court. The implication is that the Igwe does not seem to have chiefs, which is very odd because there cannot be an Igwe without a council of chiefs. It should be recalled that the Igwe says he is making Larry a chief but there are no other chiefs around to support him in the ceremony. The whole thing looks quite contrived may be as a result of attempts to save cost, which subtracts from the richness of the story.

The predisposition to maximising profits is also reflected in the production design, especially in the last sequence. To avoid the problem and huge cost of managing a large crowd in a political rally, the director resorts to footages of crowds from different events, a political rally at the Eagle Square, Abuja, and some other stadia in the country. The implication is that the sequence is more of an appliqué or mosaic of pictures, in the sense that the cut away shots of crowd, the picture quality, the mood, and the dais for the political campaign speeches, are all at variance or cross-purposes. This is something that cannot be found in advanced film cultures. If the script says there is a political campaign, then one should expect the director to assemble the kind of crowd that would reflect the situation realistically.

Furthermore, the use of the cinema verite approach in the production technique, as seen in the flashbacks and surveillance sequences, is also not realistic. For instance, it is not believable to have the sequences involving Chief Okoro and the orange seller shot from various camera angles as if the scene was lined up for actual recording. This is also the case with the sequence involving the NNPC Director and Rosa Martins, as well as the

faked killing in the farm. In these sequences, the camera is supposed to be peeping into the action unobtrusively, just like the shots from the mobile phone of the 'unknown officer' peeping into the hanging of President Saddam Hussein, former Iraqi dictator. In other words, these scenes should have been better handled to show that they are shots from a surveillance camera meant for specific reasons as opposed to planned cinematic recording.

It can also be said that the producer seemed to be in a hurry to put something together in the aftermath of Abacha's demise. Of course, there were references to the new democratic experiment that brought the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Salisu Buhari, who was disgraced out of office for claiming to have earned a degree from the University of Toronto. Unfortunately, the law is not introduced at all into the story in order to make Larry to face the consequences of all his criminal actions because there is no crime story that does not have the instrument of law pursuing criminals, no matter the social standing of the perpetrator.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to relate the film to the realities in the Nigerian political terrain. Despite the many politically motivated assassinations, as highlighted earlier, none of the perpetrators have been brought to book. Sometime in May 2007, the former Inspector General of Police, Sunday Ehindero, purportedly paraded suspected killers of Bola Ige, the assassinated Attorney-General of Nigeria, before a masked witness but members of Ige's family and the suspects countered that the whole exercise was a charade (Okezie & Ukpung, 2007, pp. 2 & 4). In the bid for politicians to get into coveted political offices, they perpetrate many crimes but go unpunished. It is therefore possible that the film is trying to highlight the abnormalities in our political terrain by putting the ball in the public court for us to judge. It is also the case that once a producer is working within a particular genre, some level of adherence to the structure of that genre is expected, and in this instance, it is a crime story. Larry is somebody who wants to become a Senator, by all means, not even the moral scruples of his parents can stop him, and not even the obstacles placed in

his way by his political opponents would stop him. He is the unstoppable political machine rolling towards and over all his opponents. In all of these, there is no conscious attempt to investigate any of his crimes. Nobody asks any questions on the murder of the cultists in the university and nobody asks questions about the murder of Dr. Mrs. Okoro. These aspects of the story violate the structures of crime stories. It is not true that the Nigerian society has become that depraved because even if the culprits of the several political killings have not been found out, attempts are usually made to investigate such crimes. This explains the position that the story looks too artificial and violates the principle of verisimilitude, in which art is supposed to mirror what actually happens, what is possible, what could happen in life, and not some kind of fantastic story that is not plausible in a modern society.

From the foregoing, it can be posted that *The Senator* is full of structural ambivalences. As submitted earlier, what sustains interest in the film is Larry's Machiavellian tactics to achieve his political ambition. It is not a plausible morality tale because it subverts the true-level structures of the crime genre. The only thing that sustains interest in the film is the desire to find out whether Larry would end up becoming a Senator or face retributive justice for all the crimes he has committed. It is when one sees that he achieves his goal with impunity that one is jolted and feels a sense of indignation.

5.8 A Critical Reading of *Masterstroke*

The second film selected for analysis here is also a two-part film, *Masterstroke*, produced by Rob Emeka Eze and Emem Isong, and directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen. A product of the Certificate in Theatre Arts (CTA) programme of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, Imasuen, over the years, has established himself as an accomplished Nollywood director. Apart from the *Issakaba* series examined earlier, he has directed many other films which include, *Yesterday* (1998), *Aziba* (2000), *Diehard* (2000), *The Pope Must Hear This* (2000), *The Last Burial* (2000), *August Meeting* (2001), and *The GSM Connection* (2001). Others include *Emotional Crack*

(2002), *Private Sin* (2003), *Critical Decision* (2004), and *Moment of Truth* (2005), just to mention a few. He has even attempted cross-border productions, partnering filmmakers in Hollywood to produce a movie, an attempt to open up the contemporary Nigerian film industry to positive global attention and acceptance.

It is true that the Nigerian political arena is replete with the so-called phenomenon of “godfatherism,” where for one to make an impact, the support and patronage of a mentor is required. It has been noted in the background study in this chapter that political leaders try every means to plant or instal their “political sons” or even biological children in positions of authority so that such persons will continue to be their stooges. Apparently, this is with the aim of remotely controlling the reigns of governance through such persons that would be so installed. This is the kind of political engineering encountered in *Masterstroke* (2004), a story on the dynamics of African politics, specifically Nigerian politics. The story is not so much about the dynamics of politics; rather, what one finds here is a philosophical approach to politics. Cases of murder, blackmail and character assassination are there quite alright, but these are not what the film is all about. The film attempts to proffer a different approach to the game of politics, which is what one might refer to as “the politics of service to the constituency,” and not “the do-or-die politics” that is practised in many African countries.

In the film, Senator Adams (Justus Esiri), a former President of the Senate, tells his son, Donald (Bobmanuel Udokwu) that it is time for him to think about his future. According to Adams, it was high time Donald followed his footsteps by cutting his political teeth; but the latter refuses because he feels he is not ready to get involved in the kind of politics played in the country. He argues that he needs a level playing field in the political arena, as opposed to what obtains because politicians take the game of politics as warfare, and it is characterised by ugly twists, subterfuges, trickery, murders, and so forth. Donald maintains that he is not ready and that when he would be ready, he would not subscribe to the negative type of contemporary Nigerian or

African politics. He avers that he would rather play a different kind of politics, what he calls “Nelson Mandela’s kind of politics,” which is politics that is aimed at rendering service. In his view, this is the type of politics in which the politician sees himself as a servant of the people and not the master of the people. In his argument, Donald observes that it is unfortunate that politicians see the game of politics as a jolly good one and never quit because of greed. This informs his conviction that politics has to be played “the Mandela way,” and that he is not ready to go into the political arena as “daddy’s boy.” Senator Adams assures Donald that he will clear the pebbles in his path, arguing that once he gets elected into office, everything will fall into place – his social, economic, and religious life. Thus, to the old Senator, the only thing fair in the game of politics is that the rules must not be obeyed.

From the father-son argument, the action switches to a parallel scene where a different situation unfolds. Simba (Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde) tries to persuade her father, Justice Oluwasegun Richards (Alex Usifo), a retired Supreme Court Judge, to give her permission to go into politics. One is therefore faced with a contrastive situation in that in the first sequence, the father tries to persuade his son to follow his political footsteps; but in a parallel scene, a daughter tries to persuade her father to allow her go into politics. Unlike Senator Adams, Justice Richards does not want to hear of politics because he is uncomfortable with the system. Specifically, he is worried that the new firebrand politicians see the game as a “life and death” affair, unlike how politics was played in the days of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, at independence on October 1, 1960. Here, Justice Richards tries to persuade Simba that the political scene in most African countries, especially Nigeria, is full of booby-traps, and that it is not exactly the kind of thing that is to be recommended, particularly for young ladies. When Simba argues that there are a lot of ladies in the Senate, he responds by asking her whether she had ever bothered asking how and what such women went through before they got there. Incidentally, Simba argues that if women have got there before her, no matter how,

she can also get there.

Consequently, the plot begins to gather momentum because Donald is seen with his friends, all of whom are committed to his going into politics, like his father had proposed. On the other hand, a rather contrasting scene is presented, in which Simba, as the leader of a group of young ladies, tries to convince all of them of the need for gender equality and the need for the female gender to take their rightful place in the society. What she does actually is give them a pep-talk in order to intimate them of her intention to run for a seat in the State House of Assembly. Eventually, they all agree that she could go to the State Assembly, as it was important for her to learn the ropes by starting at the beginning of the ladder and then climb up gradually.

The conflict in the film revolves around not the real election but the intra-party primaries in which there are eight candidates, all competing to have the same ticket, and many of these persons are extremely desperate. Whereas Simba succeeds in convincing her father and extracts a firm promise from him that he would support her political aspiration, in a contrasting sequence, Donald succumbs to the pressures from his father. With the elections barely six months away, Donald wants the number of aspirants to be reduced considerably but somehow, his conviction changes when he enters into the political arena. Subsequently, he is seen warning his friends that the game of politics is for the lion-hearted and those who can totally annihilate their opponents. Simba also realises this as she tells the “Sisters for Emancipation” in another sequence that the battle had begun and that the game is not for the chicken-hearted. She notes that while men believe it is a man’s world, they (women) have to utilise the power they possess as women. The approach she adopts is code-named CPP, meaning Care, Precision, and Persistence.

What follows is that Simba’s girls go out in full force to ensure that their candidate gets the party’s nomination for the seat into the Assembly. Of the girls, Jane (Shan George) goes after Donald, while others go after the remaining political opponents. Apparently, this is in furtherance of Simba’s game plan, which is the use of what is popularly called “bottom power.” The idea

is for all of them to use what they have, as they argue, to get what they want. In other words, Simba sends the girls to go and seduce her opponents in order to know their strategies. Unfortunately, Jane, who has the task of seducing Donald, hits a brick wall despite the fact that she sleeps with him. A lot of arm-twisting takes place in which she is held hostage in the sense that she is turned into a double-agent of some sort and forced to start spying on Simba and bringing such information back to Donald. This reveals the wily nature of Donald because he does not only force a confession out of Jane, but turns the heat on her to play along by manipulating Simba, whom he wants to meet. In the case of Steve Coker (Zack Orji), he starts dating the girl sent to interview him. In another scene, one of the girls who is a political science student goes after Segun (Emeka Ani) who says that he wants to learn the ropes as far as politics is concerned.

As a strategy reflective of the happenings in the Nigerian political terrain, Donald starts by digging into the background of all his opponents. This reinforces a joke by Michael Ogbolosingha, a popular Nigerian stand-up comedian that, once you enter into politics, it would be waste of resources to start writing an autobiography because your political opponents would write it for you as part of the popular *pull him down* (PhD) syndrome. Donald's approach is markedly different from that of Steve Coker, who uses intimidation, thuggery and outright assassination to deplete the opposition. This is not surprising because his motive for going into politics is purely for personal gains. In one sequence, he confides in the girl sent by Simba that in the last dispensation, respectable people like him were not interested in politics thus giving room for some political upstarts to go into elective offices to amass wealth. According to him, this time around, he was joining the bandwagon by deciding to play the game to make his own money.

However, what follows is a series of blackmail and assassination attempts exemplified in one of the sequences, where there is an attempt on the life of Donald in which he surprisingly dematerialises. His friend who is in the car with

him also has some kind of charms which render the bullets impenetrable to his body, so he overwhelms the adversaries and apprehends one of them who eventually confesses and names the person behind the assassination attempt – Steve Coker. The plots thicken as Coker's hired assassins corner Segun and threaten him at gunpoint to forget his political ambition or get killed. This is in accordance with the directive of Coker that his boys should not kill all the core contestants but scare away some and kill some. Expectedly, Segun is scared, runs for dear life and backs off from contesting the primaries.

In the light of the above developments, Senator Adams feels bothered that the political game was getting dirtier by the day. He confesses that he never knew that it will be this bad, positing that a game without rules is only for madmen. He then tells Donald to quit but the latter refuses, arguing that in the circumstances, it is better for everybody to go mad. On the other hand, the hired assassins also go after Simba at home but could not get her so they threaten her parents, warning them to tell their daughter that politics is a game for men, and that ladies belong to the kitchen. Justice Richards, who had faced the nozzles of the hired killers' guns, later pressurises Simba to quit. Like Donald, Simba is steadfast, saying that it will take more than three brainless gunmen to throw her off track, as she is fully equipped. Predictably, Coker falls into a dilemma as he realises that Donald is invincible, and it dawns on him that there are no prospects of his winning the elections and paying back all the money he has borrowed for his political campaigns.

Donald suspects, as the story progresses, that his father may have been hiding from him certain vital information about his past. This is because Simba's father had told her he did a special favour to the Adams family and that it was payback time, and that he was sure that Donald was going to step down for her. It is understandable that Simba takes this with a pinch of salt because she realises that she is dealing with a better political strategist. Left in the political turf to face each other, Donald and Simba realise that they have each other as a formidable opponent. To Senator Adams, Donald has to be very careful because Simba could use the power of a woman; while to Justice

Richards, it was time for the Senator to repay an earlier favour he had done him. To Donald, since he is coming from a political family, he needs to go into his father's past to see whether there were things that could be used against him in the electoral process. Thus, he sends one of his boys to the Supreme Court to scrutinise the records to see whether, in the past, his father had been brought before the court of Justice Richards. On her part, Simba feels that Donald is a better politician than herself and she does not hesitate making that confession. She comes to this conclusion when Donald stoops to conquer by going after her, ignoring her antagonism and protestations and making love advances at her. The first part of the film ends on a suspended note, as one is left guessing as to whether Donald will succeed in seducing Simba in his bid to upstage her in the political space.

The conflict continues in *Masterstroke 2*, where the political arena is now clear for the two opponents remaining in the race, Donald and Simba, to outwit each other. While Simba wants to play the game from her own side of the turf, Donald adopts a frontal attack strategy, a face-to-face game of wits, to interact with Simba. This personal interaction gives him an opportunity to assess Simba and subsequently change his strategy. He visits her because he wants to encounter the lady still remaining in the race, where others have fled; and he is not disappointed because he realises that Simba is a tigress and a beautiful one at that. In the sequence that follows, Senator Adams still pressurises Donald to quit because, according to him, he is the one that told him to roll, in the first instance, and when he says, "Cut," he has to stop for him, the director. This brings about a serious disagreement between father and son, so Donald feels the only option he has in order to remain in the race is to leave the family home and make a hotel accommodation as the base to run his campaigns. His father visits him in the hotel room eventually to rub minds with him, and still tries to persuade him to drop the idea of the elections and return to the family house. As it were, Donald has his own plans because he takes the initiative and goes on the offensive. He tells his father bluntly that he has found out why the Senator is afraid of Justice Richards. Consequently, Senator Adams recalls his conviction

and informs Donald that his acquittal and zero publicity for the trial were at the behest of the press and political stalwarts, who made the deal.

Incidentally, the story which he recalls is not presented in a cinematic flashback; rather, it is a verbal narrative by Senator Adams. It has to do with how Senator Adams murdered his Secretary at the time he was contesting the Senatorial election because he feared that she was going to reveal his strength to his political opponent. The case had gone from the High Court to the Court of Appeal, and in both cases, he had been found guilty. Surprisingly, at the Supreme Court, he won the case; and the judge in charge of the case at that time, who let him off the hook was Justice Richards. Donald is amazed and now understands why his father seems to have been so fearful of the opposition coming from the Richards' camp. It dawns on him that his father owes Justice Richards a favour and that he is now a sacrificial lamb. He is angry that his father had ignored the fact that politics, as practised in the country, is a minefield; and he is disappointed that his father had not taken cognisance of the fact that one of the siblings of the Richards was going to go into politics before pressurising him. Now that he has gone into politics, the stigma was going to be some sort of albatross to the family, hence why Senator Adams had been mounting pressure on Donald to back out in the eleventh hour in the sense that the sins of the father are now being visited on him, the son.

In his own strategy, Donald decides to date and marry Simba, as a way of being the ultimate winner. His philosophy of politics is predicated on love: love for the electorate, love for the people, as well as love for service; and that desire for service conquers all in the end. However, on one occasion, he flares up and threatens Simba, sending confusing signals to her. This is demonstrated in the sequence where after series of visits, Simba obliges Donald with an outing and they go to a restaurant where he asks Simba why she went into politics in the first place. She does not give the kind of answer which he likes because she tells him that what matters in life is love and that love is a game for the foolish. Donald does not agree with her, arguing that love conquers all, and that if truly she is into politics to serve, it

means she has love in her heart because it is love that pushes people to want to serve. This is an argument that has a lot of philosophical depth because it is only when you love people that you really want to serve them; and this is the point in Donald's philosophical approach to politics. He is in politics to serve the people and because he is in politics to serve the people, he does not believe in politics exemplified by character assassination, blackmail, wanton assassinations, and the rest of it.

In one of their interactions, when Simba reminds Donald that he should not forget that they are political enemies, he corrects her by saying they are not political enemies. Rather, they are political opponents and that there is a whole world of difference between being a political opponent and being a political enemy. Later, when he visits her office in the last sequence of the film to ask for her hand in marriage, she agrees because when he gives her an engagement ring in his office, she merely takes the ring and walks away. The film ends at the point where Simba is seen in her office with Jane and Donald comes and insists that he wants her to accept to marry him. She gladly accepts and they embrace while Jane looks on deflated, unhappy that she had been a pawn in their political chessboard. This is a salient point that is established in the film, which is the fact that politics should not be a "do-or-die affair" because in the end, Donald proposes to marry Simba and she accepts his proposal. Thus, what actually conquers all in the end is love, not hatred, not bitterness, not character assassination, and not physical elimination of political opponents. It is true love for service, love for the people, and a deep-seated desire to change the fortunes and lives of the people that really conquers all.

It is also of interest that Donald espouses the view that politics is for mature minds, noting that the secret of politics is recognising your opponents, knowing their strong points, and using them to the advantage of the people. He decides to rest his political ambition so that he can make a clean break in four years' time when he sees that there are no prospects for him again in the race. The reason is that if he is able to convince Simba into a marital relationship, he would get to the State

House of Assembly as her husband. On the other hand, if she gets there, he, as her husband, would have gotten there too and the combination of the two families, the Richard family and the Adams family, would make things easier for him in the future if he eventually decides after four years to take a shot at the Senate. The “masterstroke” here is that he goes ahead to marry Simba, support her to win the elections, while preparing to contest for the Senate seat in four years’ time.

It has been noted in passing that *Masterstroke* is thematically focused on an alternative form of politicking, the Mandela type of politics, which is politics dedicated to service of the people. The film makes a case for politics without bitterness, politics of mutual tolerance, and politics for genuine service. Donald is reluctant to go into politics but becomes a young firebrand politician when he enters the political turf. He uses every means to achieve his objective and only relaxes when he realises that there is no way out for him. Like a typical Nigerian politician, he digs into the past to unravel the secret behind his father’s fear of Justice Richards. At the end of the film, the message is that there is a need for us to imbibe a different kind of political orientation in our society. This is the type of political ideology that is borne out of the desire to serve, out of love, not love in the sense of a relationship between a man and a woman, but love borne out of a feeling for a people who are deprived, and whom one wants to uplift.

Donald wants to go into politics to serve the people and because of that, he does not believe in the politics of character assassination, blackmail, wanton destruction, arson, outright elimination of political opponents, and the rest of it. Like the late Mallam Aminu Kano, Donald advocates politics without bitterness, a politics of service, a politics based on the foundation of love for the people, love for service, and Mandela’s type of politics. Another perspective to the argument is that if politics is meant to serve the people, then it is the greatest love for the people that can make somebody want to sacrifice his freedom. This stems from the fact that anyone who goes into politics does not really have a private life again. His house becomes a public arena for series of meetings. The fact is that most people

are much more interested in going into politics solely for what they can get out of it, and this is symbolised in the behaviour of Senator Adams. He tells his son that anybody who wants to be anything in Nigeria goes into politics because, according to him, that is the place where one can protect one's businesses, a place where one can make progress, and a place to make powerful friends and business associates. Donald, on the contrary, reminds him that people should be in politics to serve and not to share the national cake, and this is a point that is of interest in the film.

From the above, it is clear that the film, *Masterstroke*, has a much more philosophical theme than *The Senator*, because the latter uses blackmail as a singular instrument of political advancement, whereas in the former, politics is perceived by the lead character as an instrument of service. Steve Coker goes into politics in order to amass wealth, so he does not hesitate to borrow to achieve his objective. It is thus an irony of fate that his strategy does not work, and he eventually bemoans his level of indebtedness and wonders how he would pay back all the money he had borrowed. Why Segun went into politics cannot be quite deduced but it would not be too different from the case of Coker. What is paramount here is the character of Donald who, as earlier observed, goes into politics for service that succeeds in the end, but not in the manner that his father had thought. Rather, in the end, Donald conquers through love because Simba accepts his marriage proposal.

The philosophical thrust of the film is equally in the sound track, which makes the point that politics is not "a do-or-die affair," and that politics should be engaged in for purposes of service, and that is what politics truly ought to be in an ideal situation. This informs the position that the philosophical thrust of the film is the presentation of a moral approach to politics, the type of politics which is based on ethical principles, which are the principles of service to the people, the principle of the politician becoming a servant of the people, a servant who is ready to sacrifice his privacy, freedom and everything. This is in the sense that politicians do not have privacy, as people, from their political constituencies visit their offices (and even houses),

professing to be “very loyal” and sometimes, they take politicians hostage until such politicians take care of their personal needs. Generally, what happens in most contemporary African countries is that once politicians get elected, they turn their backs on the electorate. In other words, once the electorate performs its civic duty by electing politicians into offices, they forget about the people until a few months to the next election before they come back begging, making vain promises all over again, and doing all kinds of things to get re-elected.

Significantly, the above is not the kind of politics which is being proposed in *Masterstroke*. The kind of politics being proposed here is what Donald refers to as the Nelson Mandela kind of politics, where people give their word and stand by it. It will be recalled that after about 27 years of incarceration, Mandela came out of prison and went into partisan politics, promising that he was going into politics to lay a foundation for a new South Africa and that he was going to serve for only one term. When he eventually got elected, true to his word, he served only one term, and thereafter, left active politics. This is why he still remains an epitome of political leadership in Africa. The implication is that for one to subscribe to Nelson Mandela as a role model is to say to the public that one is ready to follow the path which Mandela had followed. These include the path of self-sacrifice, being prepared to go to prison for the sake of the people, and coming out to serve the people without thinking of tenure elongation. This is also a way of leaving the political space for others to come and serve, because one should realise the fact that being in a position of authority does not actually mean that one is the best person to occupy that post. It is just that one was better positioned at the right time, by extenuating circumstances, to assume that position of trust, and one is obliged to render the service demanded of that office.

The above is the political philosophy which is proposed and foregrounded in *Masterstroke* through the character of Donald. In all the encounters between Donald and his father, and between Donald and Simba, all the discussions are deeply philosophical in that Donald attempts to introduce a new kind of political ideology, one which would make the politician a

man who is prepared to become a role model. The new type of politics proposed by Donald is in contrast to the contemporary Nigerian politics, which is full of blackmail, physical elimination of opponents, bribery and corruption, and all kinds of vices one can think of.

The story unfolds from the point of view of the Adams' and the Richards' families, which explains why there are parallel sequences. Senator Adams is a retired politician, who occupied the enviable position of the President of the Senate; while Richards, on the other hand, is a respected retired Judge of the Supreme Court. It is revealed that their paths had crossed in the past and that the former owed the latter a favour. Somehow, the long-standing relationship between the two is not revealed for a long time, as they do not come face-to-face in the film. Furthermore, they do not disclose how they had known each other until Donald sends his friend to dig into their past in the archives of the Supreme Court.

Another aspect of the film which is of interest is its feminist dimension. While the role of women in politics is not exploited in *The Senator*, here, the women are determined to play a positive role within the polity. In one of the sequences, for instance, Simba tries to rally round her friends to stand by her in her determination to go into politics, and they all argue that they are as capable as men when it comes to politics. They also maintain that they have equal rights in determining the future of their community and their society, and that they ought not to accept their gender position as that of inferiority in rendering service. The summary of their argument is that women are endowed in their own way, they could render services effectively, they should use what they have to get what they want, and that they should not take it that because they are women they should remain in the kitchen as one of the hired assassins said when they broke into the Richards' house to scare Simba. So, there are two strong characters: a male character, determined to play politics without bitterness, and a female character, determined to play her role in the society, determined to assert herself and occupy her rightful place in the society. In all the arguments which they make, Simba tells her father that she is not prepared

to be a coward, to be intimidated by anybody, not even when Donald calls her and warns her that she should step down and get out of town. She remains determined, focused, and inspires all the other girls to stand by her and help in the campaigns.

The question of women as sex symbols in the film also needs to be examined here. Simba relies on the power of women, and attempts to use it to the fullest. Incidentally, she gathers her female friends, not male friends, and sets them up against her political opponents so that she can get details of their strategies. While this approach succeeds, to an extent, with Steve Coker and Segun Omoniyi, it does not work with Donald and one of the other candidates. What is of interest, as it were, is that Donald goes to bed with Jane before getting her real intentions and uses the revelation to his advantage. While Steve Coker knows the intent of the girl sent to him, he goes ahead to, in his words, "have fun with her." Incidentally, on meeting Simba, whom he finds out to be a beautiful tigress, Donald decides to change his strategy by making passes at her. When he presents a gift to Simba, she confesses that he never ceases to amaze her, knowing that they were supposed to be "political enemies." According to Donald, the choice is between Simba and the seat but he has made his choice, which is, Simba.

The only child syndrome is also portrayed in the film in the sense that the two antagonists, Donald and Simba, are the only children of their parents, giving the impression that Nigerians maintain nuclear families. Adams and Richards are also married to one wife each, though it is disclosed that Justice Richards had lost his first wife, Simba's mother, and had remarried. This also gives the impression that Nigerians are predominantly monogamists, which is not the case. As a matter of fact, it is common knowledge that, in practice, there is hardly any family of the high class where just one wife and an only child would be found. These are actually the class of persons whose voices were loudest when erstwhile military president, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida wanted to implement a policy of "one wife, four children."

In his approach, the director makes use of parallelism, as a major narrative technique. The film starts from the residence

of the Adams, where he is telling his son that it is time for the son to go into politics. Donald refuses, arguing that the way the game is played in the country is not decent for law-abiding citizens. In the next sequence, Simba comes home gleefully to announce to her father that she has decided to go into politics, and that she wants his blessing. The contrast becomes interesting because while Adams virtually hounds his son, Donald, to enter into politics to make a name for himself, Simba pesters her father to support her bid. Furthermore, while Donald plans his strategy with his male friends, who eventually convince him to run, Simba gathers her female friends, under the aegis of the “Sisters for Emancipation,” to solicit their support. What plays out from this point is more of a battle of the sexes, as both camps are segregated along gender lines.

Symbolism is also another narrative technique in the film. The use of guns, which symbolises political violence as subsisting in the larger society, is pertinent. Many a politician use hired assassins to annihilate political opponents as exemplified in the tactics of Steve Coker, who uses thugs to intimidate and deplete the number of aspirants. While this approach succeeds in scaring Justice Richards, his attempt at eliminating Donald fails because of the charms he uses – Donald vanishes when he is attacked and the bullets did not penetrate the body of his friend. Apparently, Donald had entered the political terrain after acquiring protective charms from native doctors, knowing that violence reigns supreme in Nigerian politics. There is no gainsaying the fact that many politicians visit servants of God during the day and go to the shrines of native doctors at night, all to oil their political machinery. Again, this is rooted in African belief systems as observed in the study of the *Issakaba* series. It is also amazing that people believe and capitalise on the thinking that a man’s body could be made impenetrable to high velocity bullets, or that one could dematerialise from a spot and re-materialise in another place. This is coterminous with the belief system on which Ibrahim Hussein anchored his play, *Kinjeketile*.

In the area of characterisation, some of the traits of Donald, Simba, Senator Adams, Justice Richards, Steve Coker and Jane have been highlighted, in the course of the analysis of the film.

The lead character, Donald (Bobmanuel Udokwu), is the young, amiable, and confident son of Senator Adams, and he does not want to live under the shadow of his father. Somehow, he has not been spoilt by the high social background under which he was brought up and he does not want to live on past glories. Though he is an only son, he believes in living realistically and building his own reputation in life. At first, he was very sceptical about the political orientation of the country, but when he experiences the nature of politics as he goes deep into the game, he becomes very calculative and strategic in his approach. He has abiding faith in traditional African beliefs, which explains why he acquires the necessary charms to enable him dematerialise when he is attacked by hired assassins at the instance of Steve Coker. He is a realist and knows how to beat a retreat when the odds are stacked against him. He also trusts that his amiable nature would have a positive influence on the human frailty of women, and capitalises on it to start a dating game with Simba. He is futuristic in his political ideology, which informs his adopting the “masterstroke” by marrying Simba, helping her to win the elections to the State House of Assembly, with a view to taking a shot at the Senate in four years’ time. Like earlier observed, he believes in politics of love and service, and not politics of bitterness.

Simba (Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde) is the Kikuyu word for lion. Incidentally, Donald refers to her as a tigress, and a beautiful one at that. Though she had lost her mother at a tender age, her emotional attachment to her father is such that she can be considered, “daddy’s baby.” Unlike Donald, the decision for her to go into politics was taken out of her own volition, and she later pesters her father to give her his fatherly blessing. She is presented as a strong-willed woman who believes that being a woman is not a disadvantage, and that women should use their physiological endowments to make impact where men have failed. This informs why she gathers the Sisters of Emancipation to solicit their support to actualise her political ambition. It is not surprising therefore that Donald becomes curious about the real persona of Simba, a young lady who stands her ground where men flee. She refuses to be intimidated by the failed attack

of the hired assassins, maintaining that she would not run like a coward, but would fight to the end. Subsequently, Simba becomes very suspicious and careful about the real intentions of Donald, and confesses to her father that he is probably a better politician than herself. She comes to this conclusion when she is no longer very sure of the strategy he is adopting to win the primaries. To Simba, they are supposed to be political enemies who should be mindful of each other; but Donald does not see it that way, arguing that they are only political opponents, and that what is paramount in the game of politics is the desire to serve the people. In matters of love, Simba is of the view that a lady should tread carefully, especially after being disappointed once. Thus, she bides her time when Donald starts making advances at her. Once she makes up her mind that she actually loves Donald and would want to marry him, she pleads emotionally with her father to give his blessing. In the end, when she embraces Donald, the contentment of a woman who has conquered her opponent is seen on her face.

Senator Adams (Justus Esiri), a former President of the Senate who had retired from partisan politics, plants the political mustard seed in his son's heart in the first place. He had forgotten that the political terrain had become a landmine where people had to tread carefully or they are consumed. As a politician of the old order, he still believes that politics is the quickest way for one to make it in the country, not business or professional practice. Incidentally, he is an old man who is easily scared, that is why he pressurises his son to step down immediately the political atmosphere becomes very turbulent, occasioned by the attempted assassinations and outright elimination of political opponents. At the beginning, he does not take cognisance of the fact that he has skeletons in his cupboard which could be used by political opponents against his son. He is easily jolted because he becomes scared when he finds out that Donald's formidable opponent is the daughter of Justice Richards, who had done him a big favour several years before. Little wonder then that he identifies with the strategic approach of his son, and eventually sees the wisdom of Donald marrying Simba and gunning for a seat in the Senate in the next four years.

Justice Richards (Alex Usifo) is a revered Justice of the Supreme Court who had retired meritoriously. There is no doubt that he had been apolitical, and may have been forced to let Adams off the hook when he presided over his murder case about 24 years earlier. He is enjoying his private life in retirement and never wants anything to do with the turbulent political system in the country. Thus, he is worried that his daughter is wading into the murky political terrain, and only gives his permission when she promises not to lose track. He is a loving father, and fears for her life when her political opponents become brutal in their strategies. In an attempt to protect Simba, he pressurises her to back out on account of the assassination attempt on her life, because having lost her mother, he cannot bear losing her also in the name of politics. Also, Justice Richards is angry that Simba, in her wildest imagination, can think of going out on a date with Donald when he is the most formidable opponent she has. He however believes that he has to protect the interest of his daughter, which informs his assuring her that the Adams owed him a favour, and that it was high time he asked for it. It is his loving nature as a father that eventually makes him to give Simba his blessing for her to marry Donald.

Steve Coker (Zack Orji) is a ruthless politician of the highest order, whose entrance into politics is purely to amass wealth. His concept of politics is representative of contemporary Nigerian politicians, who think more of what they can get out of the political process, rather than what they can contribute to the development of the people and the society. He is an opportunist who takes advantage of the girl Simba sends after him. Ironically, he knows the real intention of the girl, but plays along, saying that he would continue to have fun with her as far as the affair would last, and still carry out his diabolical political designs. This is in the sense that Coker sees politics as a do-or-die affair; he goes to the extent of attempting to exterminate all the serious political opponents and scares off the rest. He sees politics as a business venture in which one can conveniently borrow in order to invest. He has borrowed huge sums of money to ensure that he gets the party ticket at the primaries, and presumably carry out his electioneering

campaigns. He is ruthless as manifested in his sending hired assassins after Donald, Simba and Segun, all in an attempt to protect his “investment.” His approach makes an impact in that one of the candidates is assassinated by his thugs and he scares off Segun, who appears to be lily-livered. Unfortunately, he is unlucky with Simba and meets a brick wall in his attempt at eliminating Donald. When it eventually dawns on Coker that Donald is invincible, he sees his political dreams going up in smoke and he bemoans his debts.

Jane (Shan George), on the other hand, is a close friend and confidante of Simba, who gives her all the support from the onset. Simba’s trust in Jane may have informed her being given the task of seducing Donald, the most formidable opponent of Simba. Unfortunately, she plays into Donald’s hands when a lot of arm-twisting takes place and she is forced into becoming a double agent who equally reports back to Donald. Somehow, she becomes insincere from that point because she does not tell Simba the truth. Rather, she lies to Simba that she has not been anywhere close to Donald’s bed, when actually she had hopped into his bed right from the first day. The fact is that she plays into Donald’s hands and unconsciously becomes a pawn in the political chessboard being tossed between him and Simba. Her inability to open up to Simba makes her the loser in the end because she watches helplessly as Donald comes in at the end of the film and takes Simba in his arms. It is thus pathetic that she ends up playing the unwilling umpire in the emotion-filled romantic moment. This is a situation that may have been avoided if she had revealed to Simba right from the onset that she had fallen in love with Donald.

In terms of narration, there are key areas where the camera has been manipulated deftly to narrate the story. In most of the scenes, especially the scenes involving daughter and father or son and father, the actions are moved indoors, framed, and shot against the backgrounds of comfortable family atmospheres, even though the discussions may be stormy in the case of Donald. It is seen that they are mostly framed in close-up shots in which expressions of frustration, anger, tension, determination, and so on, are felt by the viewer. Specifically, the viewer is able to

empathise with Donald when he finds out that his father has a skeleton in his cupboard and that he is going to make him a sacrificial lamb even though the whole idea of going into politics is initiated by his father. He feels sad and disappointed at his father for not realising that his past can be exhumed under the new political dispensation. Every time Simba discusses with her father, one feels the emotions from the close-up shots. For instance, when she is asking him for permission to get married to Donald, the feeling of fatherly love is seen, and Simba's love for Donald is written all over her face. In the scene in question, she is shot in a very close shot, which is composed to reveal the happiness in her face as she tells her father that she thinks that she loves Donald and that she is asking his permission to marry him. The permission is granted because her father knows that she is a very strong girl. Also very remarkable is the little game which she plays with her father when she closes her hand into a fist to show him that she is a strong woman, even as she looks delicate.

There is also one remarkable scene in which a journalist leaves his seat for the couple when Donald and Simba go to a restaurant. As they leave the restaurant, some journalists pursue them to ask questions. While Simba refuses to answer, Donald takes time to answer their questions, telling them that politics is a game of love, and that he is in politics to serve, and has found in Simba the qualities of a woman who is determined to serve, and who has the kind of qualities which would complement his when he eventually gets to the State House of Assembly. Rather than begin to confront her, he is there to court her friendship, to convince her into making her become an ally instead of being an enemy. There is no arguing the fact that this is quite remarkable because it makes the required impact which sends jitters up the spine of Justice Richards. Another remarkable scene is the one where the two of them are coming out of an office. Donald tries to convince Simba that he is there to stand by her and that at the appropriate time, he is going to step down for her, and that she should not feel threatened. The inter-cutting of medium shots of Simba and Donald in the sequence as they discuss and walk to the garden bar is very

romantic because it is shot in the garden with flowers on both sides of the walkway. Furthermore, the use of low and high angle shots, the use of mirror shot in the sequence showing Simba driving on the road in a jeep, giving the impression that they are keeping left on the road, are some of the key compositional high points that are well choreographed to attract viewers' attention.

In the final analysis, it can be posited that *Masterstroke* is a film that offers a different perspective to politics in a positive way as opposed to the way it is being played today because it portrays typical characters that can serve as moral lessons to us. Senator Adams belongs to the old political brigade while Coker believes in politics of elimination of political opponents. Also, Justice Richards is a person who knows his calling, a man who would not want to be in a subservient position to the legislature or the executive, a man who treasures his independence and the independence of the judiciary; and so, he stands up against all kinds of opposition.

5.9 A Comparative Analysis of *The Senator* and *Masterstroke*

Before drawing conclusions from the foregoing analysis, it is pertinent to briefly attempt a comparative analysis of the two films that have been examined in this chapter. Both films centre on the political ambition of youngsters, who are bent on realising their ambitions. In *The Senator*, Larry dreams of becoming a Senator, and pursues his childhood dream assiduously all through. There is no doubt that this is the reality of the political process in Nigeria because no politician thinks of giving up on his/her dream, unless there are circumstances beyond his/her control. Taking cognisance of the fact that politicians pay very high premium on paper qualification, Larry resolves that he needs a doctorate degree as an added advantage in the political process. For example, Gen. Sani Abacha was said to be pursuing a degree programme in the University of Abuja before his death, though he was said to have never attended classes; and President Olusegun Obasanjo was the first student that the National Open University, Abuja, registered. There was also the case of Alhaji

Salisu Buhari, the first Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives in the Fourth Republic, who was disgraced out of office because his claim of having had a university degree from the University of Toronto was found to be untrue. This much Professor Onyeama mentions in the scene where Larry says he wants to have his doctorate degree in two weeks time, when he still has 18 months to go on the programme. Unfortunately, the Dean succumbs to blackmail and graduates Larry because he too has some skeletons in his cupboard.

The film also straddles the Abacha transition programme up to the time he met his death. To the Onuigbos, the demise of the maximum ruler was, “good riddance to bad rubbish.” This, as political analysts may very well recall, was the reaction of the notable radical lawyer, Chief Gani Fawehinmi (SAN), when the death of Gen. Abacha was announced. On getting the death news, Mike equally expresses concern whether the person taking over (obviously referring to Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar) would continue with the transition and hand over to a democratically elected government.

Despite the fact that royal fathers, as custodians of the people’s cultures and traditions, are expected to be apolitical, most of them are actively engaged in politics. This is to the extent that many of them are domiciled in their state capitals or the Federal Capital Territory, hardly seen in their domains; and some of them are even involved in businesses, actively bidding for juicy government contracts. Little wonder then that Larry consolidates his position by getting the backing of his traditional ruler, because the act of receiving the blessing of royal fathers to score a political point subsists in the country. This comes mostly in the form of chieftaincy titles, which evidently confer status on such beneficiaries. It is common knowledge that such titles are highly monetised in the sense that the person acquiring such chieftaincy titles pay dearly and this goes a long way in enhancing the economic and social status of the monarchs.

It had been noted that the campaign period is always heated, and that it was a time to arm-twist one’s political opponents to step down. Chief Uwakwe as an experienced politician would not want a political neophyte like Larry to challenge him in the

party primaries. When he finds out that Larry is using a hotel room as his campaign office, he talks to him with contempt, thinking that as a starter, Larry would eventually come and beg to be settled, as it obtains in the political process. On the contrary, he is rattled when Larry eventually confronts him with a dossier on his rotten family background. He realises that news of his son's involvement in hard drugs in the United States of America and of his daughter being a prostitute in Italy would cause serious damage to him at the polls. In the face of the blackmail, he has no option than to step down for Larry to protect his family. It brings to the fore the self-centred disposition of politicians, because Chief Uwakwe steps down for Larry in order to protect his children. This is rather unfortunate because in taking that decision, he heartlessly abandons his followership midstream. Thus, one sympathises with his personal aides who, in the course of his speech at the campaign ground, enthusiastically display posters of their political leader, only to drop them in dismay when he throws in the towel. There is no gainsaying the fact that this is the habit of many a Nigerian politician, who while agreeing to negotiated settlements, do not consider their numerous followers. The same scenario plays out in *Masterstroke* because Donald changes his tactics and decides to marry Simba instead of going into the party primaries. The implication is that many of his followers would also be disappointed; this is just as Jane is left in the ditch as Simba agrees to marry Donald. Apparently, she will not be comfortable with the relationship and may even be in their way in due course.

The point of Larry escaping the long arm of the law is also of interest in *The Senator* because this seems to underpin the several unresolved political killings in the country. Maybe because of lack of self-confidence, many political aspirants believe that the best way to overcome the opposition is through outright assassination. They have no qualms doing that because of the failure of the policing system. Larry progresses from one blackmail to the other and from one killing to the other, all in the bid to actualise his lifelong political ambition. This substantiates the point about the assassinations of Bola Ige, Pa Alfred Rewane, Marshall Harry, A.K. Dikibo, and Funsho

Williams, which are just a few of the unresolved murders that have shaken the country down to its foundations. Perhaps, this has given perpetrators of political crimes, in the likes of Larry, the confidence to carry on their heinous deeds with impunity.

Masterstroke also portrays various concepts of the game of politics as played in Nigeria. Incidentally, while Adams, as an old politician, sees politics as a way of making it to the top, Justice Richards sees it as a dirty game which one has to be wary of. The relationship between the two families shows the high level manoeuvrings that take place in top government circles, where the impossible can be made possible. It also shows the extent to which the executive can interfere with the independence of the judiciary and how the judiciary can sometimes allow itself to be compromised for one reason or the other. Nonetheless, the redeeming thing is that sanity appears to be returning to the judiciary, with the hammer of the National Judicial Council (NJC) descending on erring Judges in Anambra, Oyo, Plateau and Ekiti States, for their inglorious roles in the respective resignation and impeachments of governors in those states.

Interestingly, Donald digs into the past of his father to find out why his father develops cold feet every time the name of Justice Richards is mentioned. There is no doubt that if the evidence had favoured him, Simba would have been in very serious trouble. Paradoxically, after committing murder which is a very serious crime, Senator Adams is let off the hook because of his political connections and serves his term successfully as the Senate President. It can be suggested that Justice Richards may have been blackmailed into the negotiated settlement, and that the press may also have been paid to black out the news. The fact is that security operatives could invade a media house and close its operations for attempting to publish such a damning story, and where a media house is obstinate and publishes such a story, what the affected party does is to buy off all the copies just as the publication hits the news-stand. This would virtually limit the circulation (and readership) of the story in question, thereby making people to hear of such news items as mere rumour.

Steve Coker (Zack Orji) is also a symbolic representation of the typical Nigerian politician who goes into politics to loot the public till. He borrows money to appropriately fund his campaigns for the party primaries. The implication is that politics is seen as a business venture where one thinks of the probable gains; and because he sees it as a business, he borrows money to start as if taking a bank loan to execute a contract. When he realises that the chances of his winning the primaries has become very slim, he laments his predicament, wondering how he will pay back all the money he had borrowed. The good thing is that there is poetic justice because Coker realises that he would lose in the primaries, and that all his machinations have been in vain. The lesson to such politicians is that there are no prospects of winning an election through underhand or untoward approaches.

Finally, both films are reflective of the prevalent production practice in Nollywood in the sense that they all feature very small casts and do not show campaign grounds that portray the level of followership they command. However, while *The Senator* represents the negative approach to the game of politics, *Masterstroke* portrays both sides of the political coin. There is also a redeeming dimension to the latter film because Donald's philosophy of politics is that of love, service, and sacrifice. It is a concept of politics that is people-oriented and offers some hope for contemporary Nigerian politics and politicians.

5.10 Summary

This part examined the nature of politics and the political process in Nigeria, and how Nollywood films have attempted to reflect this reality. The argument is that the prevalent political atmosphere in any country has determinate effect on the production of political genre films. In the Nigerian experience, the advent of the present democratic structures appears to have provided a fertile ground for producers to veer into the political turf and come out with critical statements. This position has been established with critical analyses of the political process in *The Senator* and *Masterstroke*.

There is no arguing the fact that political genre films need

to inculcate in the populace the essence of self-discipline in their foray into the game of politics. The generality of the people need to realise that material gratification from deceptive politicians may just offer momentary respite from whatever penurious conditions. The assurance of a better tomorrow is in good democratic government; it is not in selfish and family-centred political gains. It can be surmised that the approach to the political genre film corroborates the position of Ekwuazi that, “the ultimate function of any film and the auteur’s need to accommodate the exigencies of politics determine what aspect(s) of truth/reality to be mediated, and how” (1987, p. 33). What filmmakers could not dare to portray under military dictatorships, especially during the despotic Abacha regime, they have attempted to do in the present civilian dispensation.

It can be recalled that the worldwide transmission of the film, *Mandela*, brought global attention to the reality of apartheid and the ordeal of Nelson Mandela. The production of *Hotel Rwanda* brought to the fore, the concrete realities of the Rwandan genocide, and the agonising war of attrition between the Hutu and the Tutsi, which had haunted Rwanda. This creation of awareness instantaneously cannot be achieved with printed literatures or theatre performances, which shows the power of film and how it can be used to bring positive development to political problems. This is the awareness films like *The Senator* and *Masterstroke* have attempted, in their own way, to create in Nigerian audiences.



Summary and Conclusion

In this study, the development of Nollywood, the contemporary Nigerian film industry, has been traced, noting the fact that the production context of any film culture determines the emergence of genres or film movements. The study identified, in the main, the generic development in Nollywood, beginning from the language and ritual genre, to the epic and historical, prostitution, crime/gangsterism, love and romance, comedy, Christian, and the political genre, among others. It also identified some trends in the emergent industry. These include the cross-over of television-trained directors to the industry, the rise of Igbo actors and actresses, the parts syndrome (which is a carry-over from TV soap opera tradition), the negative portrayal of women and false family structure, the rise of apprentice directors, the transformation of executive producers as producers/directors, the bandwagon approach in the production of emergent genres which reflects the market traders orientation of those who ventured into the industry at its inception, and piracy of video films, among others.

Part of the work critically analysed selected film productions, which are representative of some of the emergent genres, namely, *Igodo* and *Egg of Life* (epic and historical genre); *Issakaba* (crime/vigilante genre); and *The Senator* and *Masterstroke* (political genre). One of the submissions is that *Igodo* has been a pacesetter in the epic and historical genre

films; and that *Egg of Life* was more of a response to the demands of the viewing public, an attempt to present a positive image of women as heroines capable of providing alternative leadership in their communities. It was also deduced that, with works like *Ijele* (2000), *Ebube* (2000), *Ojadike* (2003), and *Lion King* (2003), among others in the epic/historical genre, OJ Productions has carved a niche in the annals of the contemporary Nigerian film industry as one of the stables that have popularised the epic/historical genre.

Furthermore, it is posited that the failure of the regular policing system in Nigeria had necessitated the citizenry embarking on vigilante activities to secure lives and property. The rise of crime rate and the inability of the police to combat the menace have forced Nigerians to realise that it is better to take their destinies in their hands rather than waiting helplessly for security agencies that are not responsive to distress calls due to one problem or the other. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm that welcomed the emergence of the vigilante groups, like the Bakassi Boys, was short-lived because such groups took laws in their own hands. The “Issakaba boys,” a pun on the “Bakassi boys,” were looked upon as a group that would save the people from the menace of armed robbers and ritualists; but they ended up becoming a cancerous growth that needed surgical operation. This had also provided the breeding ground for crime/vigilante genre films. The *Issakaba* series vividly portrays the vigilante saga in the south-eastern states of Nigeria.

From a critical reading of *The Senator* and *Masterstroke* in the political genre, it is apparent that the contemporary Nigerian film industry has become a very powerful medium, and that if well harnessed, it can contribute to the initiation of ethical principles in our body politic. It might not be an instant solution or revolutionary approach, but a focus on works which are didactic would be invaluable to the reorientation of emerging politicians. This is in the sense that the films should not be for mere entertainment in the current search for sustainable political development or the Nigerian project. They should fulfil the functions of art, which, in the view of Yuri Borev, is “to enhance the individual’s social awareness and assert his

absolute values” (Borev, 1985, p.124).

As a point of fact, the seeming lack of commitment by film producers/directors to delve into political genre films had been occasioned by the dictates of the commercially driven industry. Consoling as such a position may be, it is realised that the thematic preoccupation of a film is an extension of what obtains on screen. There is thus the need to come to terms with the fact that the most meaningful dramatic situations, to Nigerians, are those that reflect the true picture of our experiences. Since they arise from amongst the people and are not imperialist impositions, people can easily identify with them. As slices of life patterns and experiences, the situations become ready extensions of the lives of people, as individuals and as social beings on the screen.

In conclusion, it is apparent that more work needs to be done on the generic development in the contemporary Nigerian film industry, Nollywood. The stranglehold the executive producers (who ‘mid-wifed’ the industry into fruition) have on the industry, where they decide which films to market, which film stars to ban or unban, which artists to feature and how much to pay such artists, when films are to be released, and so forth, has stunted the growth of the industry. Rated third in the world after Hollywood and Bollywood, Nollywood promises to be a great revenue earner for the country, comparable to crude oil, if government harnesses all the resources and provides the enabling atmosphere for the industry to thrive. Aihe notes that “Nollywood is a success because it is giving opportunity for people to see their stories on screen” (2005, p. 30). There is every reason to believe that if the marketing aspect of the industry is opened up and deregulated, the financial sector may be well encouraged to offer credit facilities to production companies and possibly independent producers/directors to further help expand the frontiers of Nollywood, the developing contemporary Nigerian film industry.



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Queen of Hasso Rock 1 & 2 (2005). Prod.: Louis Isikaku. Dir.: Adim Williams. Stars: Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde, Enebeli Elebuwa, Joe Adekwagh, Vitalis Ndubuisi, Nora Roberts. Louis Merchandise.

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"Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres is a welcome addition to the growing body of works on the Nigerian cinema. It is part film history and part film theory and criticism. The history part traces the origin of the Nigerian cinema up to the present era of video productions. The work examines in detail, the contextual issues which have helped to define emergent trends within the industry. The fascinating aspect of the work exploits the theories of film genres as a framework for the analysis of the genres in the Nigerian film industry."

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—Femi Shaka

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